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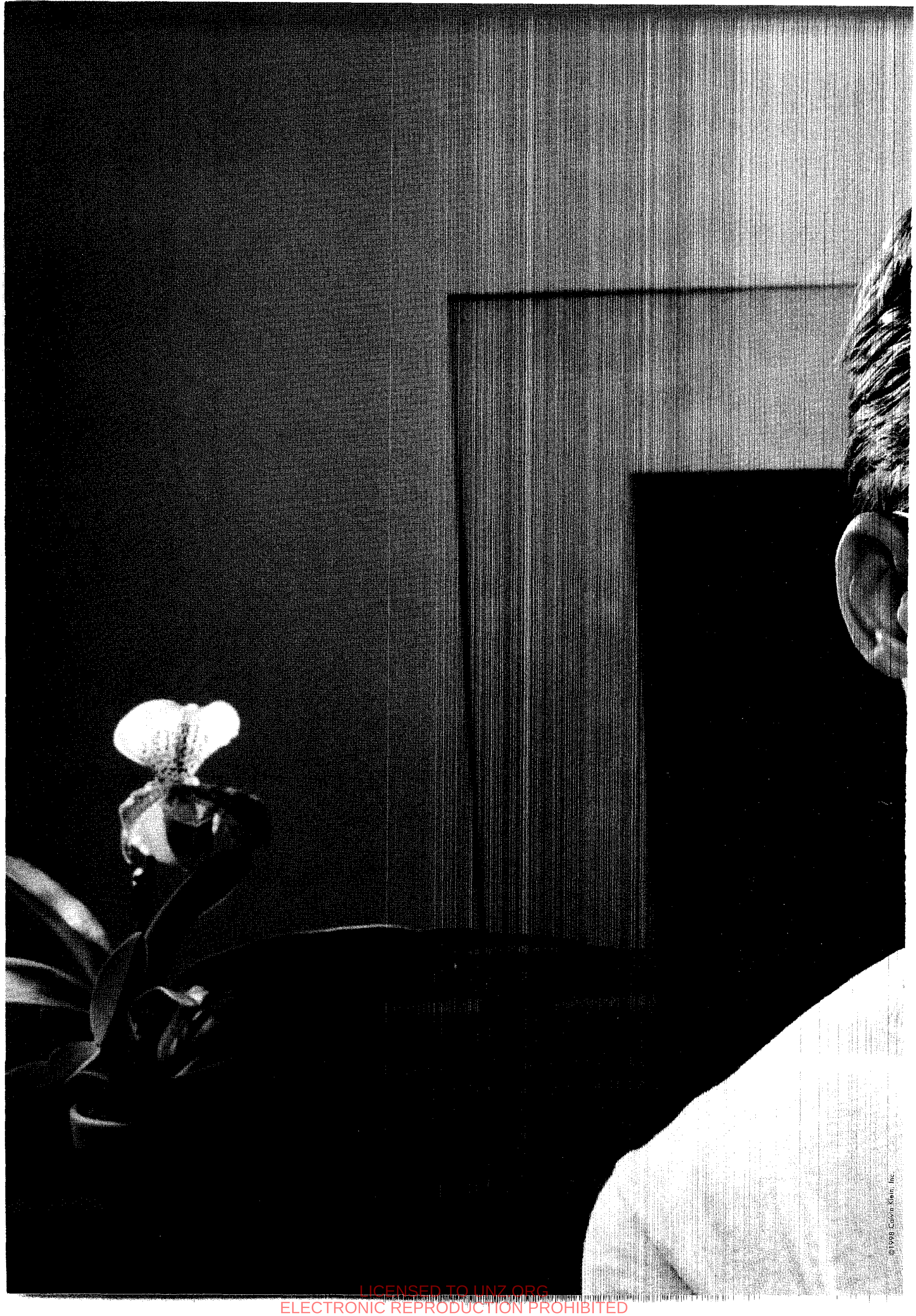

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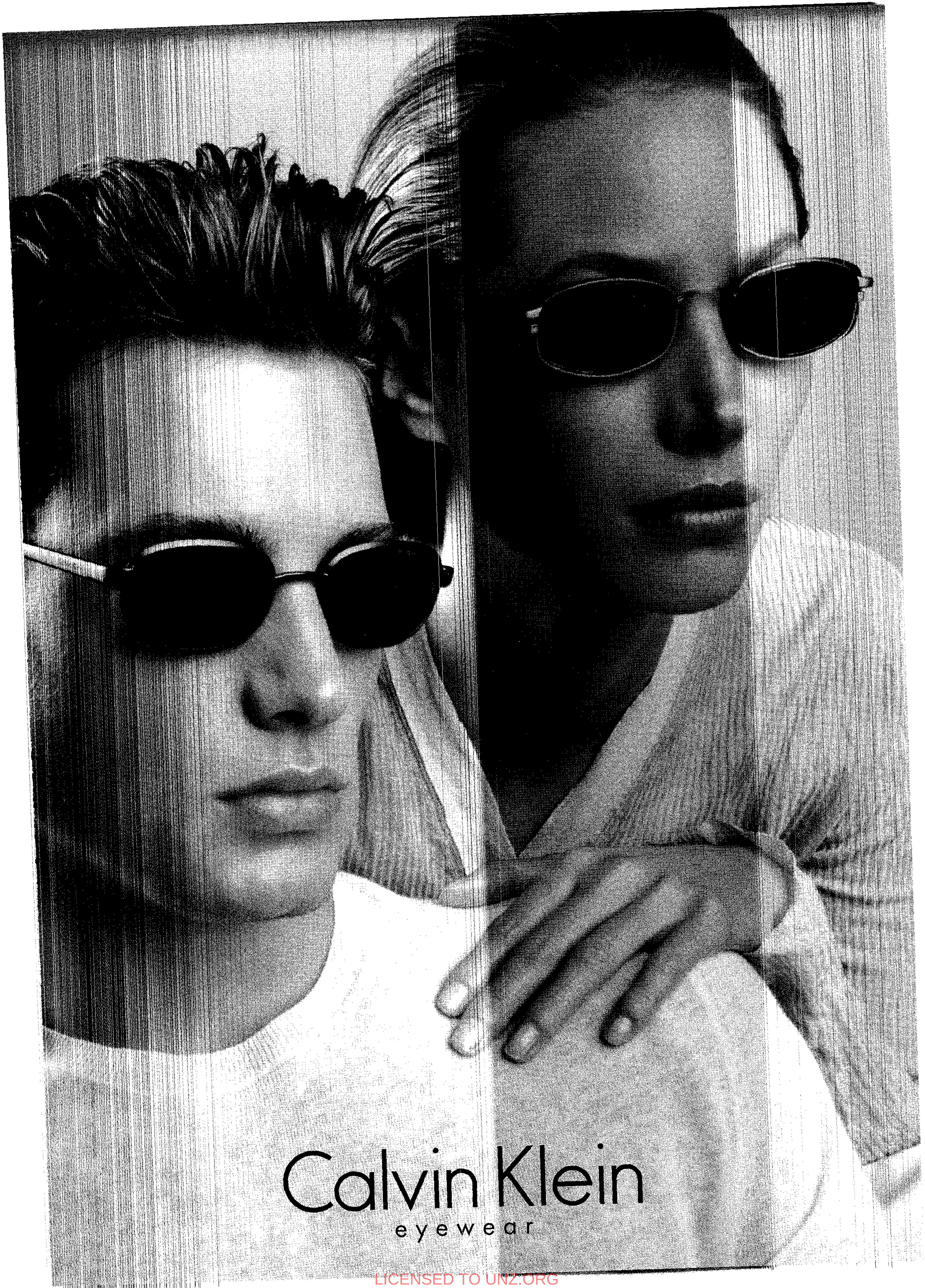
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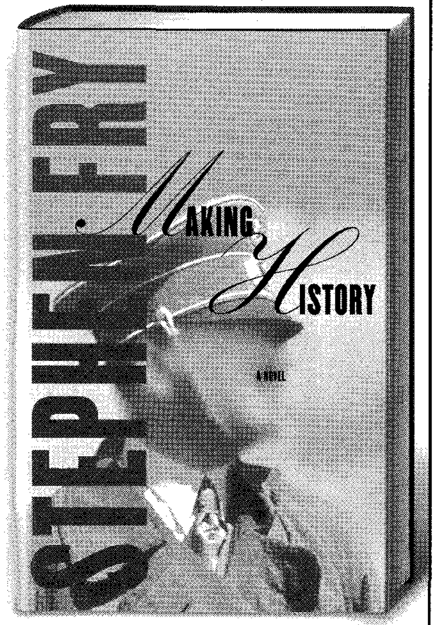

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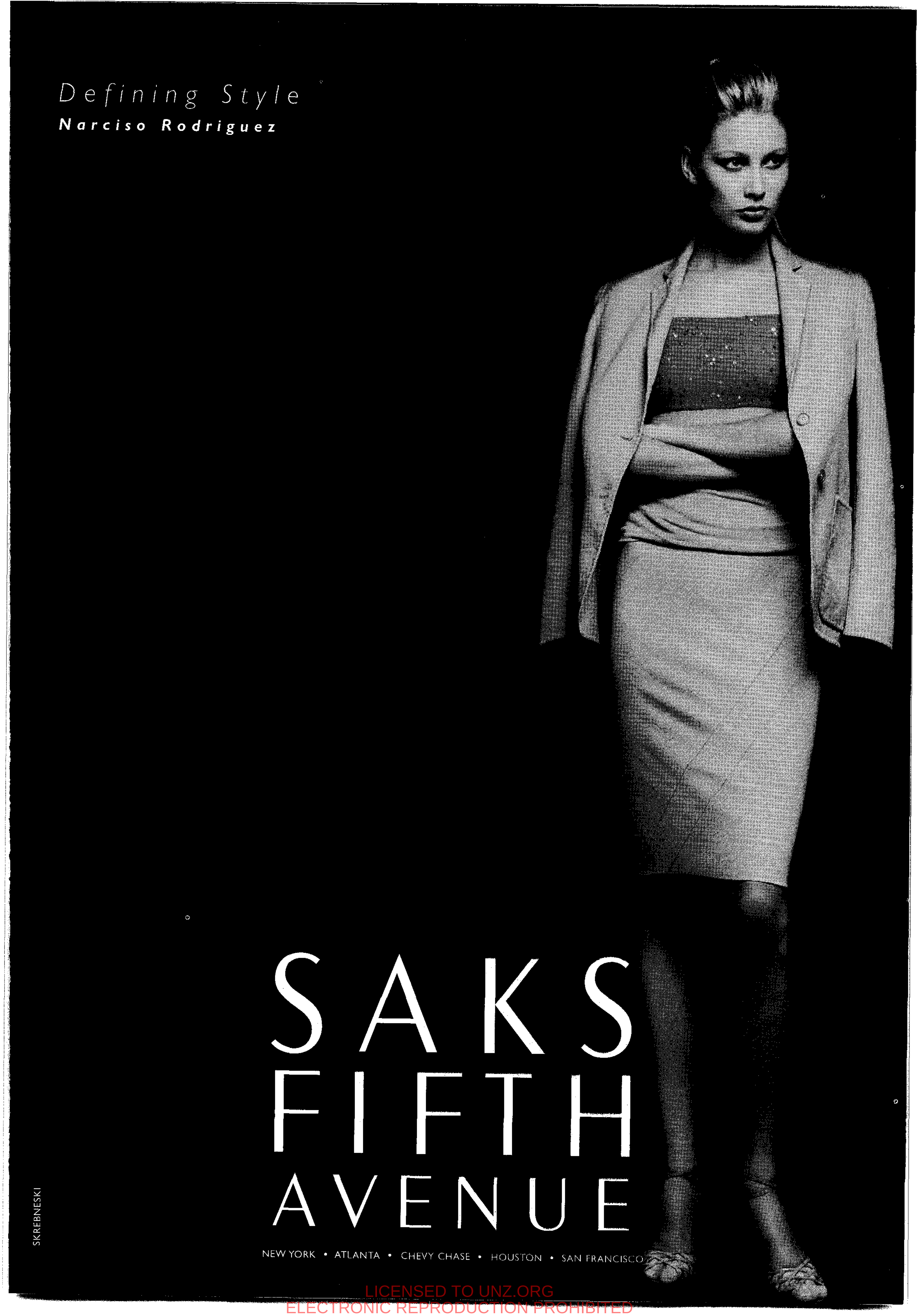
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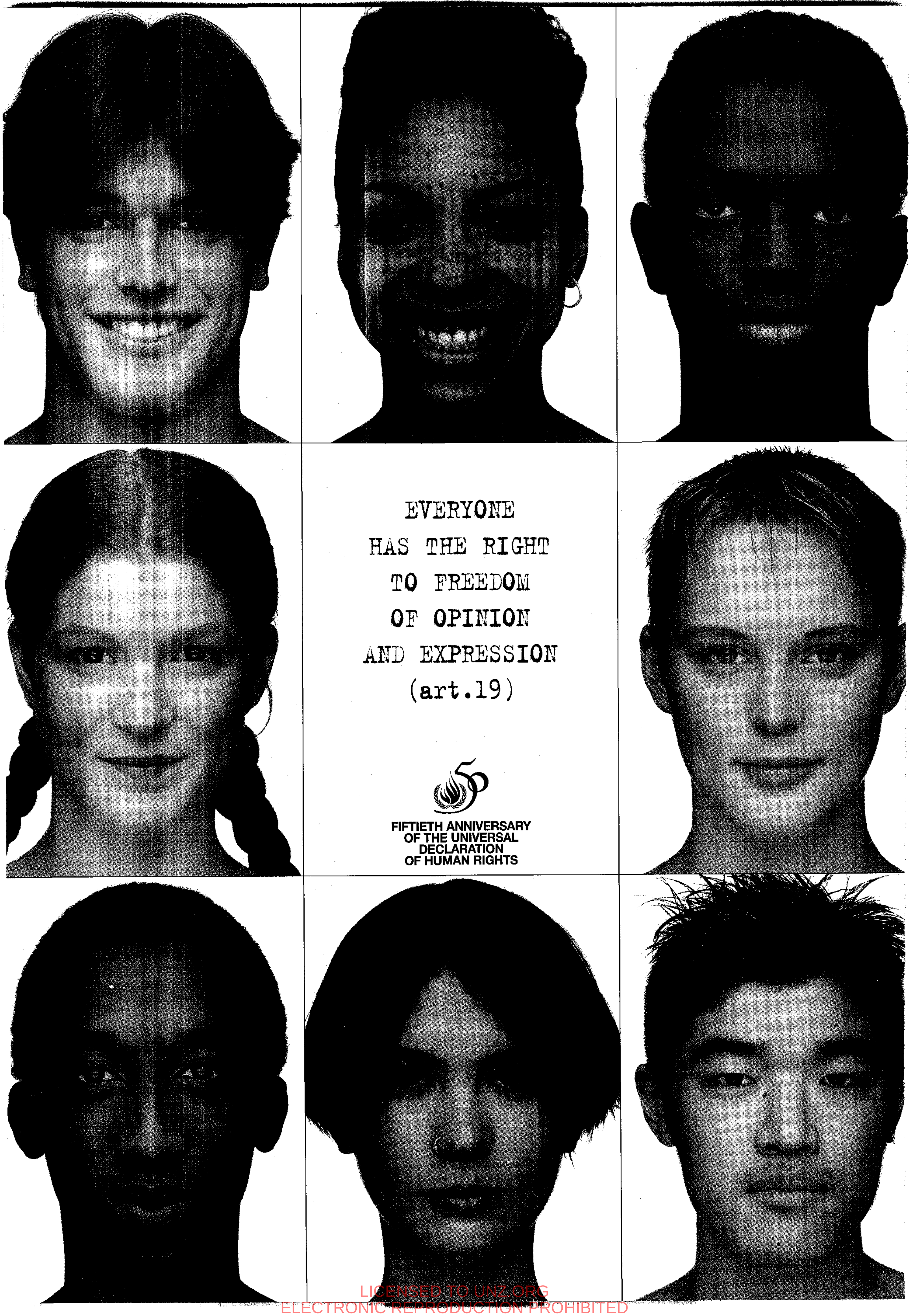
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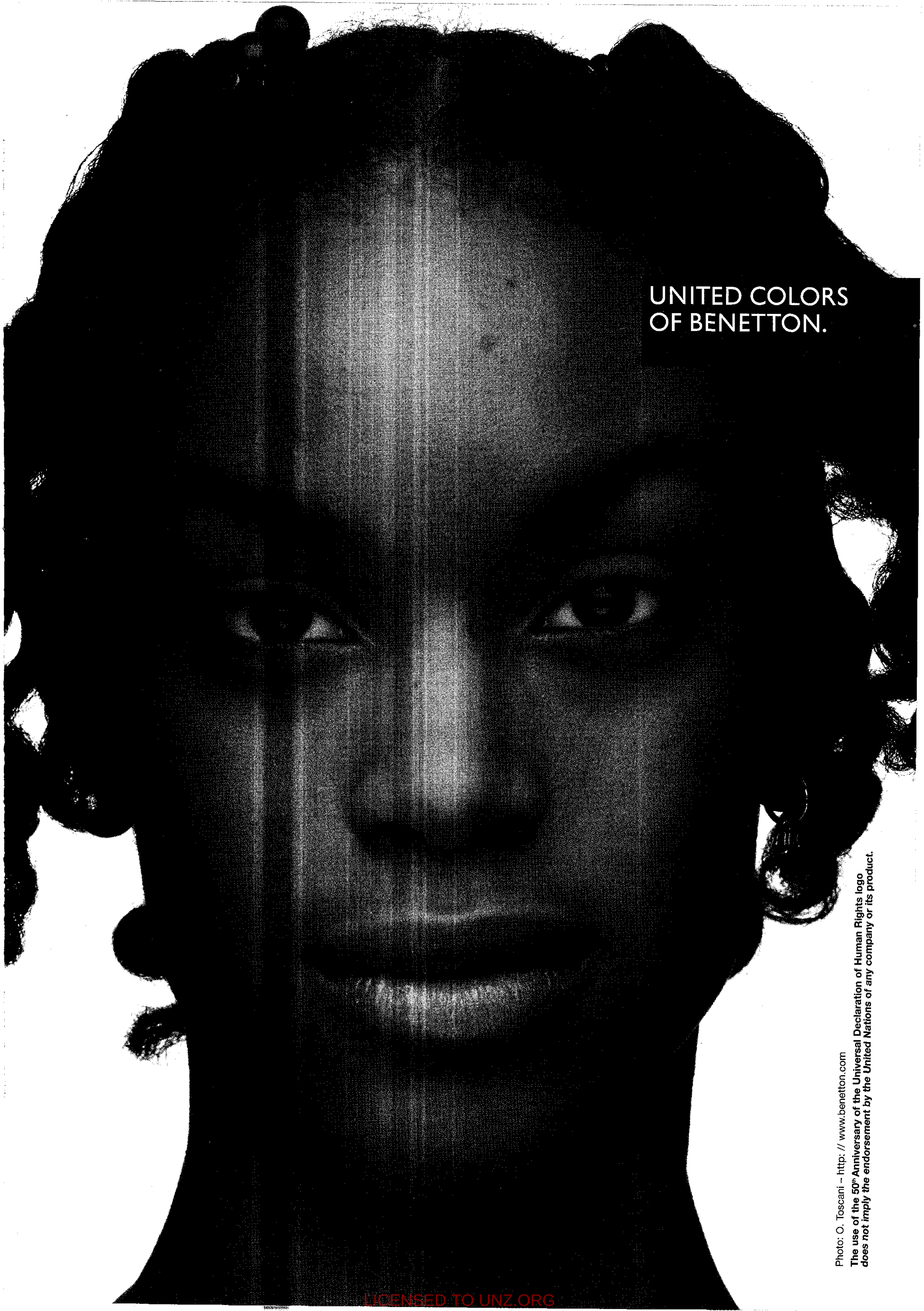
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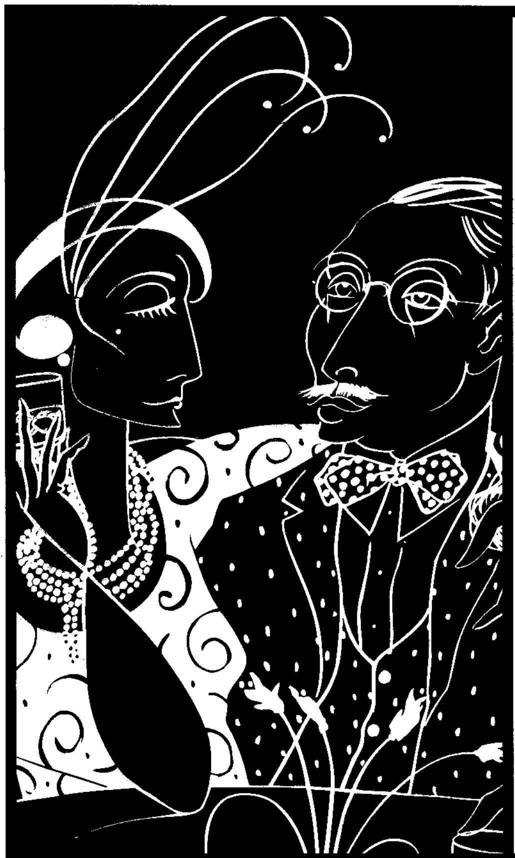

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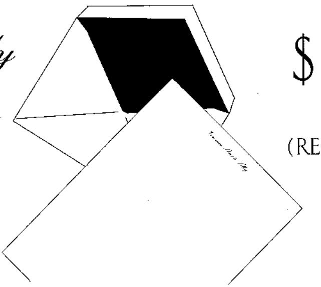

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MARY BUTTS (Fiction, p. 110), 1890-1937, was an expatriate English writer who published five novels and three short-story collections. A biography of her, by Nathalie Blondel, will be out this month. ♦

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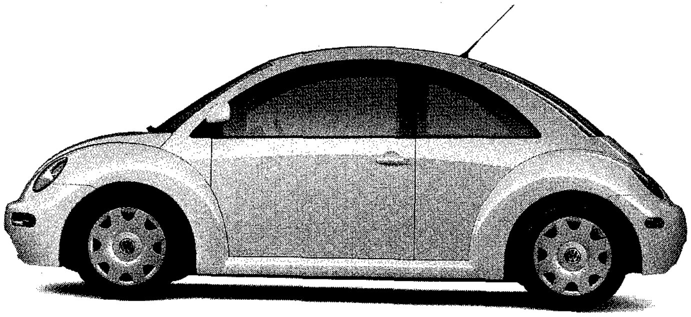

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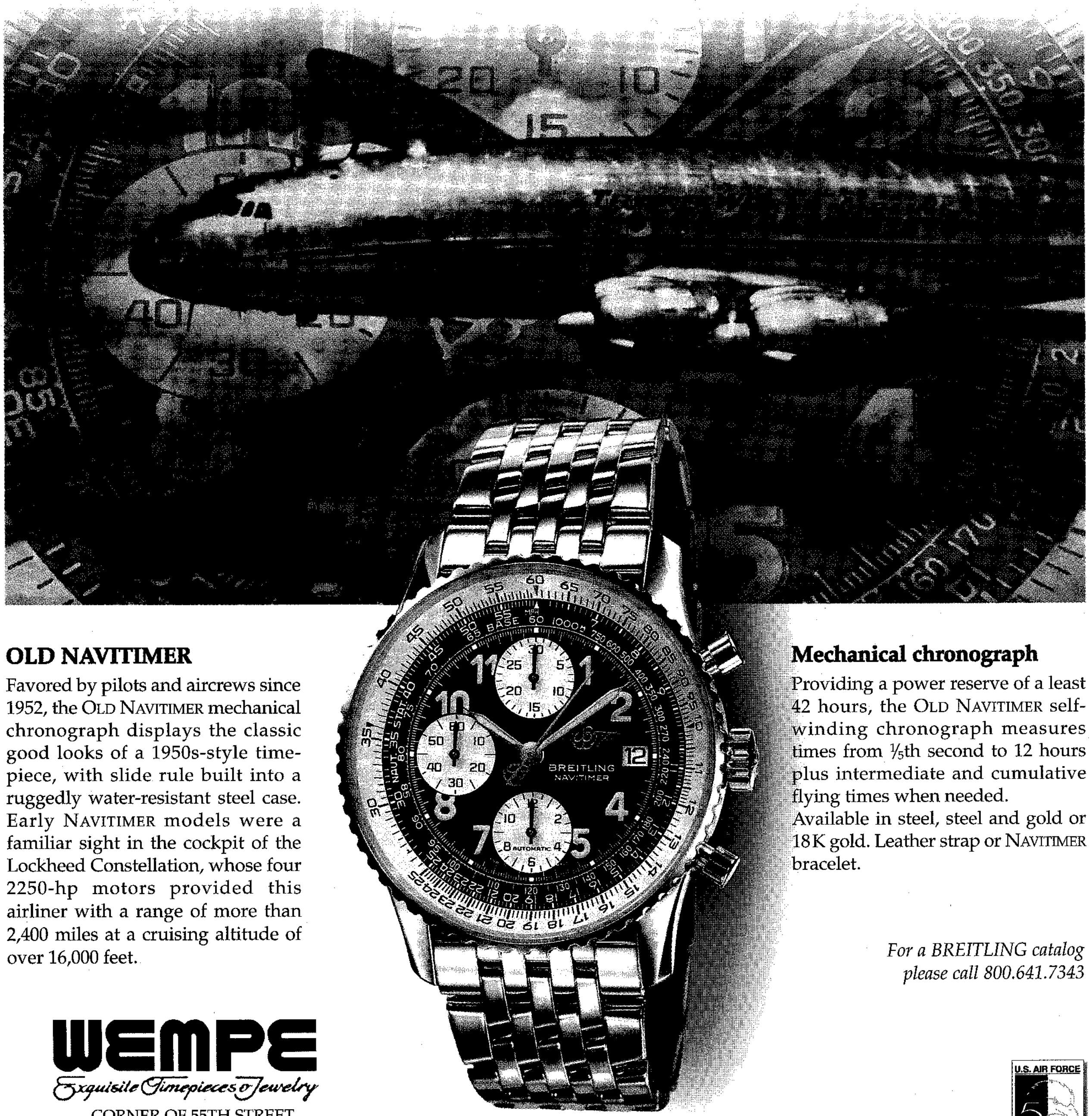

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COMMENT

BLUNT TRAUMA

We've come a long way from "[expletive deleted]" and "[barnyard epithet]."

FOR better or for worse, America has always been a place devoted to the literal, the unambiguous, the explicit. In all the verbatim details of the Clinton sex scandals, amazing as they are, there has been something consistently, recognizably American. Remember Lyndon Johnson spontaneously exposing the fresh surgical scars on his belly in 1965? The Jones-Lewinsky-Willey episode is to politics and the media as extreme sports are to sports—wild and dangerous but not unfamiliar.

Americans are eager to judge and to be judged by outward appearances. This is the land of the passionately blatant—of Christian fundamentalism, Hasidic Judaism, flower children. This is the land of the plainspoken Yankee and the scream therapist, of Las Vegas and the twelve steps, of Howard Stern and Joe Friday, of shameless revelation and unembellished facts. "It would be well," Dickens wrote in 1842, if Americans "loved the Real less, and the Ideal somewhat more." The commitment to obviousness, to transparency, is what makes both the Shakers and Donald Trump so profoundly American: 'tis a gift to be simple, but it's a kick to give Matt Lauer a televised tour of the fantastic penthouse you're trying to unload for twenty million dollars, too.

For a few mid-century decades, America, in its maturing young adulthood, seemed to be moving toward European civilization's embrace of the elliptical and the difficult, of connotations and subtexts: important painting became abstract; serious buildings abandoned decoration as corny and primitive; significant fiction got murky (Faulkner, Pynchon, Gaddis, Barthelme); religion turned vague and metaphorical. Particular meanings, such as they were, had to be sussed out. Opacity was cool.

But there has been a change. Since the late nineteen-seventies, literalism has been gathering force. The renaissance of figurative painting, biographical theatre, narrative history, and postmodernism of almost every stripe is about a surrender to unapologetic literalism. Modernist architecture seldom announced its meanings, but then, in the sixties, along came Robert Venturi, who celebrated both Las Vegas and familiar iconic buildings. Now we reflexively see buildings as billboards geared toward high-speed glimpses: architecture that gets right to the point.

This renewed embrace of explicitness has lately spread all over the ur-

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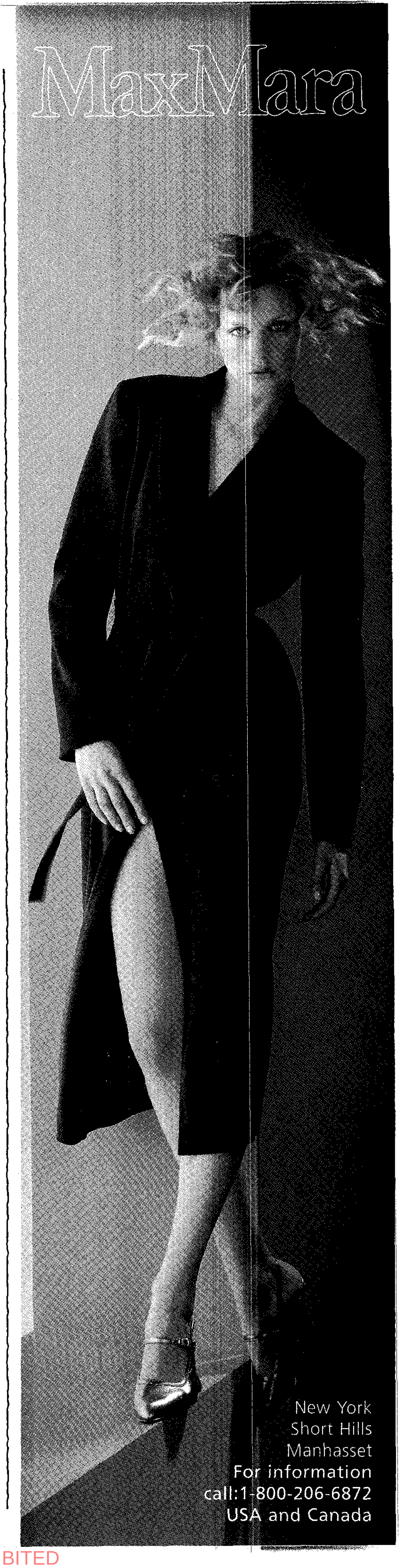
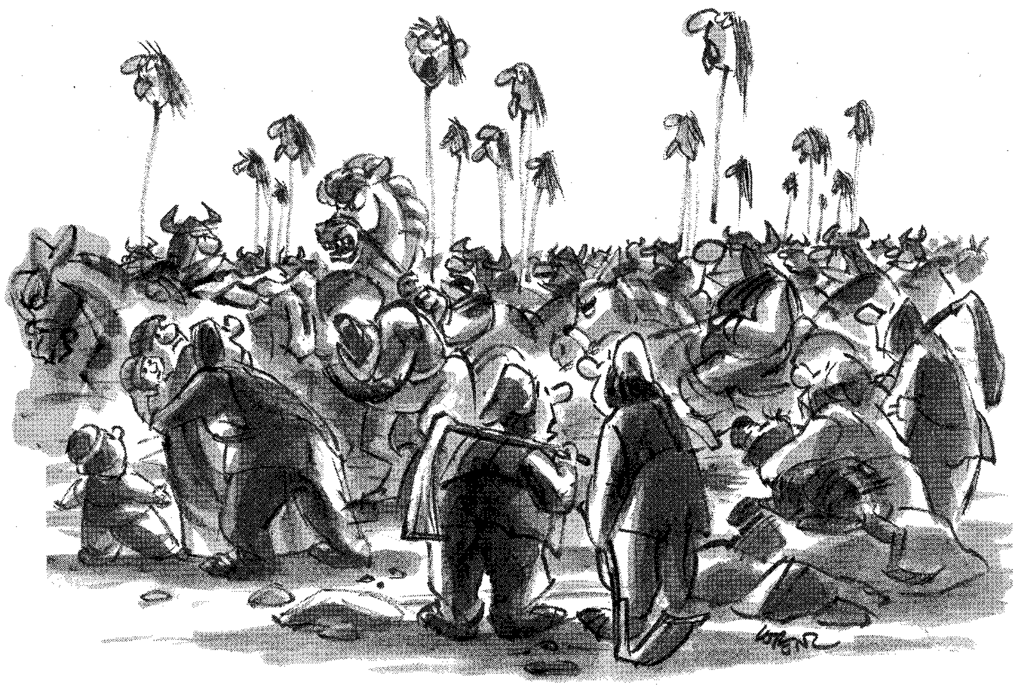




"As I understand it, this is part of the transition to a free-market economy."

• •

American realms of merchandising, TV, the mass market. A new line of women's shoes called Wannabe seems like a joke (why not just call them Behind the Curve, or Loser?), and two of the more thoughtful younger designers—Tom Ford and Marc Jacobs—have lines featuring logo-wear: Ford is happy to affix big Gucci "G"s to belt buckles and shoes, and Jacobs has spattered his first collection for Louis Vuitton with the familiar "LV" symbol. While this season's stylish woman may resemble a piece of luggage, she will unmistakably resemble a piece of very expensive designer luggage.

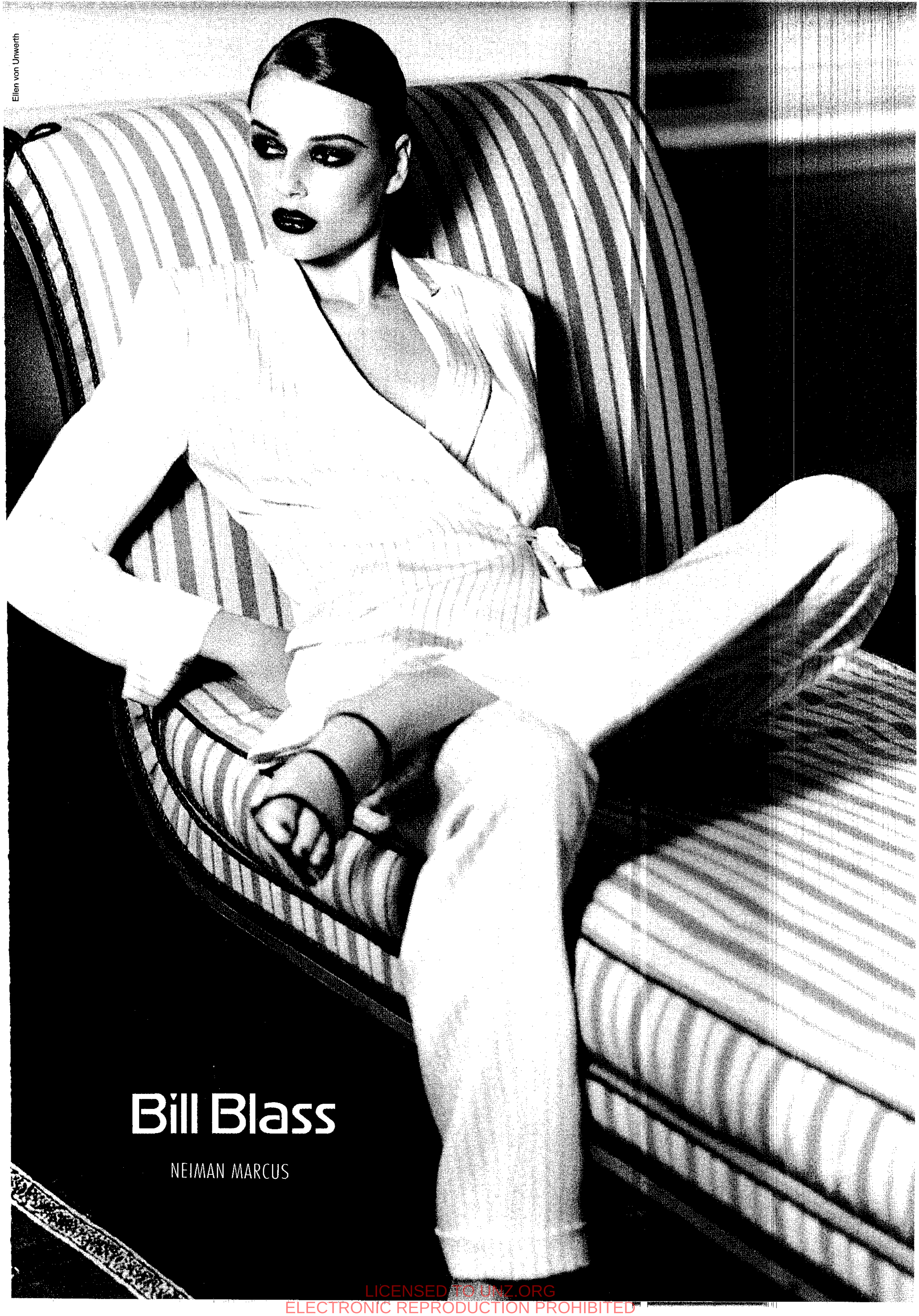
The fragrance industry, adjacent to fashion but wholly propelled by marketing voodoo, and thus an even purer litmus test of the zeitgeist, has gone wildly, thoroughly literal. The big perfumes of the past, the classic brands—Shalimar, L'Air du Temps, Chanel No. 5—became successful by merely suggesting, and almost never explicitly asserting, their romantic auras. Connotation was everything. Now fragrance nomenclature is blatant, direct. There are two ways to go. A majority of the new perfume names consist of a simple, very specific *nice* word: Beautiful (Estée Lauder), Pleasures (also Lauder), Modern (Banana Republic), and, inevitably, Happy (Clinique). The other option for naming a new fragrance is to appropriate nouns from the dark side, perfume as psychopathology: Obsession (Calvin Klein), Longing (Coty), Contradiction (also Klein), Egoïste (Chanel), and, most remarkably, Envy (Gucci). (The fragrances Acquisitive and Delusion do not yet exist, as far as we know.)

One view of this development is that it marks a return to good old American candor. The hugely successful line of "... for Dummies" how-to books ("The Internet for Dummies," "Fly-Fishing for Dummies," and so on) is an example of this: simple, practical advice for pragmatic people too busy to bother concealing their ignorance. But most of the current manifestations are not exactly Norman Rockwellian. If you want to open restaurants where the main attraction is young waitresses with large breasts, you call the restaurants Hooters. How about a chain of discount tobacco outlets? You call it Cigarettes Cheaper. Nuance has never been the strong suit of show business, and film is a literalist medium, but thirty years ago only a tiny minority of Americans had ever seen a pornographic movie; last year the average American household watched six porn videos.

Happy perfume and Hooters' fries undoubtedly appeal to different audiences, as do William Bennett's "Book of Virtues" and Beavis and Butt-head's "This Book Sucks," but what makes all of them big sellers is the same impulse. Sentimental or vulgar, revelling in the straightforward and the brazen is their common denominator. In 1993, when "Beavis and Butt-head" premièred on MTV, it was shocking and funny to hear the animated stars say "This sucks" over and over again. Now, on "South Park," the Beavis and Butt-head for the second half of the decade, it requires a singing turd and the line "Kyle's mom is a big fat bitch" to generate the same pop attention, and it isn't as funny.

We're all Beavis and Butt-head now. What was too coarse for polite conversation a few years ago has become the mainstream's vernacular. In the last few months, a casual scanner of the media could have happened upon Conan O'Brien and a radio d.j. saying the Spice Girls suck, *G.Q.* saying soybeans suck, *Fortune* saying Disney's animated movies have sucked, and the buttoned-down chairman of Intuit software telling a conference of C.E.O.s that his advertising sucked. The word "fuck" recently appeared in a piece of fiction excerpted on the Web site of the New York *Times*—the New York *Times!* The *Wall Street Journal* reported that, according to Howard Kurtz's new book on the White House propaganda machine, the President's press secretary described the First Lady to reporters as "the mummy [Clinton]'s been fucking." The most talked-about new plays this year are " 'Art'," which is about art, and "Shopping and Fucking," which is about what you'd expect.

On "60 Minutes" a few weeks ago, Mike Wallace, interviewing Sally Quinn about the Clinton scandals, used the word "pussy," but the show bleeped him—an interesting, awkward, real-time moment in the transition to the new explicitness. What is the appropriate response to the epidemic of stark obviousness, high-concept literalism, rude candor? Is it thumbs up or thumbs down? Neither. Some of it is refreshing; some of it is appalling; a lot of it is amusing; most of it is just the American way. By definition, therefore, it doesn't totally suck. —KURT ANDERSEN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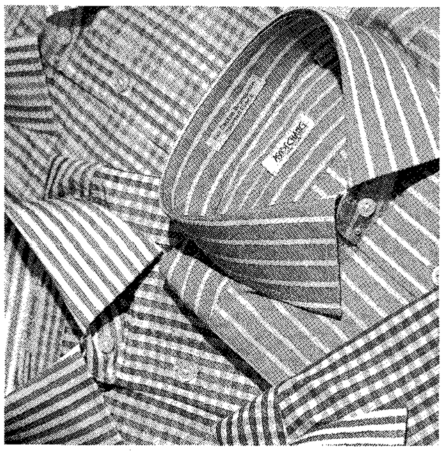

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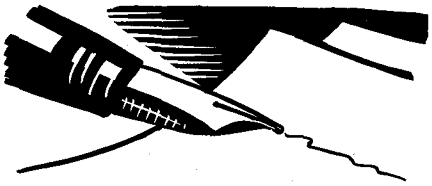

INDECENT PROPOSALS

I read John Cassidy's article about the California economy ("The Comeback," February 23rd & March 2nd) with increasing dismay. Perhaps if he had done more than acknowledge with a single parenthetical statement the "rising economic inequality," the "crumbling schools," and the "dysfunctional political system," he might have captured the ambiguous social effects of economic growth in California. The business leaders Cassidy interviewed have a legitimate story to tell, but theirs is not the only one. Is California on the road to becoming "a model economy"? Maybe—for some. Cassidy might have asked for whom.

CHRISTOPHER SCHMIDT-NOWARA
San Francisco, Calif.

Neither Jeffrey Rosen's post mortem of Proposition 209 ("Damage Control," February 23rd & March 2nd), which when passed last year eliminated the social policy favoring affirmative action, nor Cassidy's observations on Proposition 13, which since its passing, in 1978, has had a deleterious effect on California's educational and social infrastructure, criticized California's ballot-initiative process, the proximate cause of virtually every regressive step taken by this state in the last twenty years. Our state's elected representatives, it seems, have become so timid that they consign everything the least bit controversial to the ballot. There the outcome is determined by a relatively small number of mostly white, mostly older voters, whose well-organized special-interest groups are having their way at the expense of the health and welfare of the rest of the citizens.

WILLIAM F. ADLER
Mountain View, Calif.

FANTASTIC LIGHT

Los Angeles is not the only place in California blessed with "heartbreaking" light ("L.A. Glows," by Lawrence Weschler, February 23rd & March 2nd). Here in Santa Cruz, the recent storms have resulted in mesmerizing sunsets. I've seen dark clouds in the west backlit by the sun, with white streamers of light shooting down immediately behind them. The clouds in the east seem to be lit the same way—an effect both disorienting and unreal. With this rogue weather we're having, maybe one of these days the sun will set in the east.

ROSEMARY CURETON
Santa Cruz, Calif.

GIVING WARNER HIS DUE

From the middle of the nineteen-thirties until the end of the forties, my father, Philip G. Epstein, and his twin brother, Julius, worked for Warner Bros., where together they wrote more than two dozen pictures. At the time, the Warner Bros. motto was "Combining Good Picture Making with Good Citizenship," but in 1945, when studio goons viciously assaulted several picketers outside the lot, Julie and Phil suggested changing it to "Combining Good Picture Making with Good Marksmanship." Jack Warner put up with this and other pranks until 1947, when he turned their names over to the House Un-American Activities Committee. In due course, the committee sent the Epsteins a questionnaire consisting of only two items. The first: "Have you ever been a member of a subversive organization?" The second: "Name that organization."

To the former, they answered "Yes"; to the latter, "Warner Bros." They never heard from the committee again.

LESLIE EPSTEIN
Brookline, Mass.

EDITORS' NOTE: A reference to City College in Jeffrey Rosen's "Damage Control" (February 23rd & March 2nd) was incorrect. The community colleges within the City University of New York, of which City College is a part, do have open-admissions policies, but City College does not.

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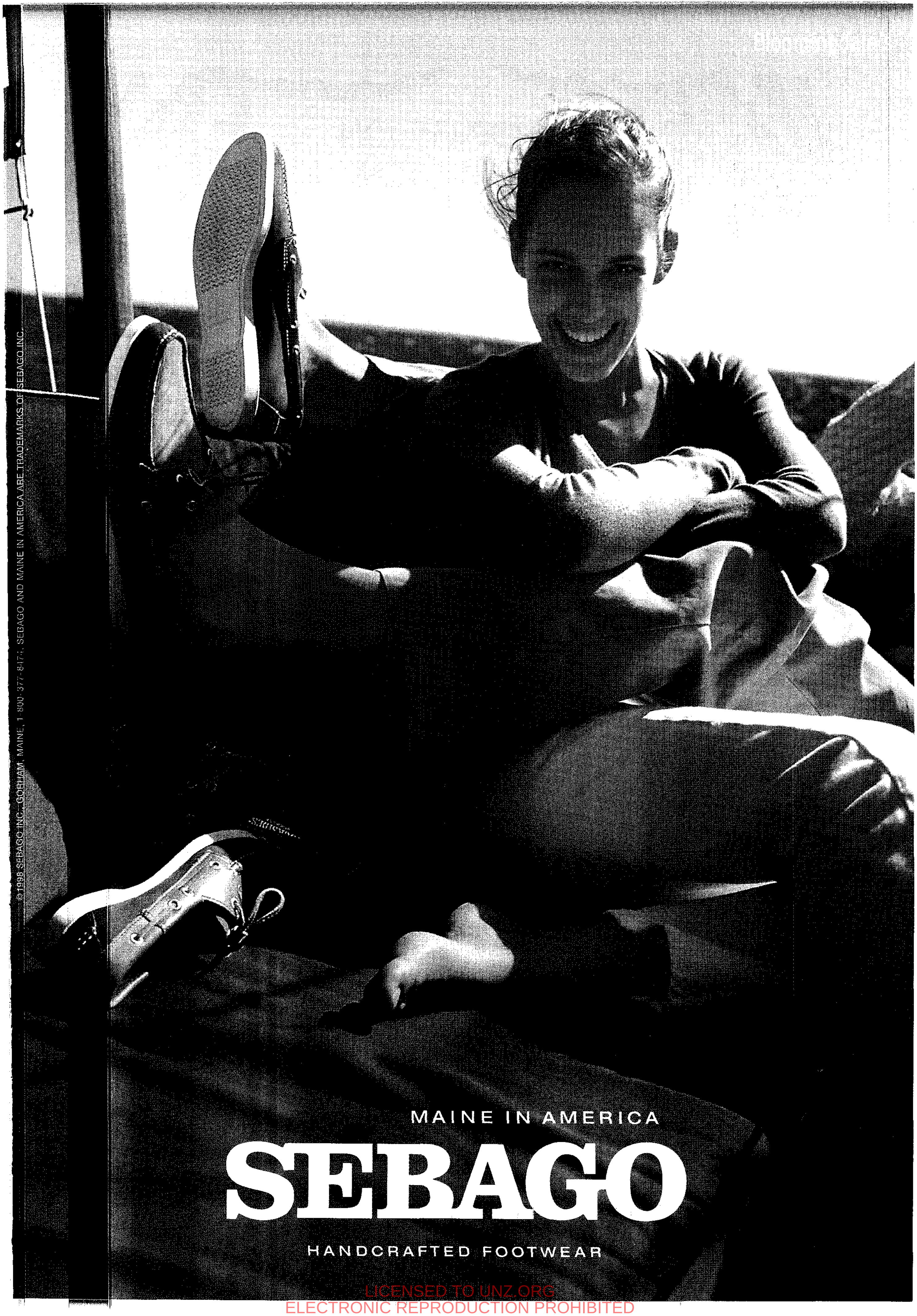
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The Chairs—From London, a Théâtre de Complicité/Royal Court Theatre production of Ionesco's tragic farce. Directed by Simon McBurney. In previews. (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

The Cripple of Inishmaan—Jerry Zaks directs a play by Martin McDonagh, in which a clannish island community off the coast of Ireland is visited by a Hollywood producer. In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 260-2400.)

The Deep Blue Sea—Blythe Danner and Edward Herrmann star in a revival of Terence Rattigan's 1952 drama. Two previews on March 25. Opens March 26 at 7. (Roundabout, Broadway at 45th St. 719-1300.)

Dress to Kill—The British comic Eddie Izzard returns to town with a new show. In previews through March 25. Opens March 26 at 8:30. (Westbeth Theatre Center, 151 Bank St. 741-0391.)

Golden Child—David Henry Hwang's drama about a Chinese businessman struggling with the evolution of cultural traditions. James Lapine is the director. In previews. (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

The Herbal Bed—Shakespeare's daughter is put on trial for adultery, in a drama by Peter Whelan. Michael Attenborough is the director. Previews begin March 27. (Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

Hot Klezmer—A celebration of wedding music of the shtetl. In previews. (American Jewish Theatre, 307 W. 26th St. 633-9797.)

Jails, Hospitals & Hip-Hop—Danny Hoch returns to P.S. 122 with a new solo show. In previews through March 28. Opens March 30 at 8:30. (150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288.)

Li'l Abner—City Center's Encores! series continues, with a concert staging of Johnny Mercer and Gene De Paul's 1956 musical. March 26-27 at 8, March 28 at 2 and 8, March 29 at 6:30, and March 30 at 6. (131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

Much Ado About Nothing—The British troupe Cheek by Jowl touches down in Brooklyn to present Shakespeare's comedy. March 25-27 and March 31 at 7:30 and March 28 at 2 and 7:30. Continues through April 5. (BAM's Majestic Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636 4100.)

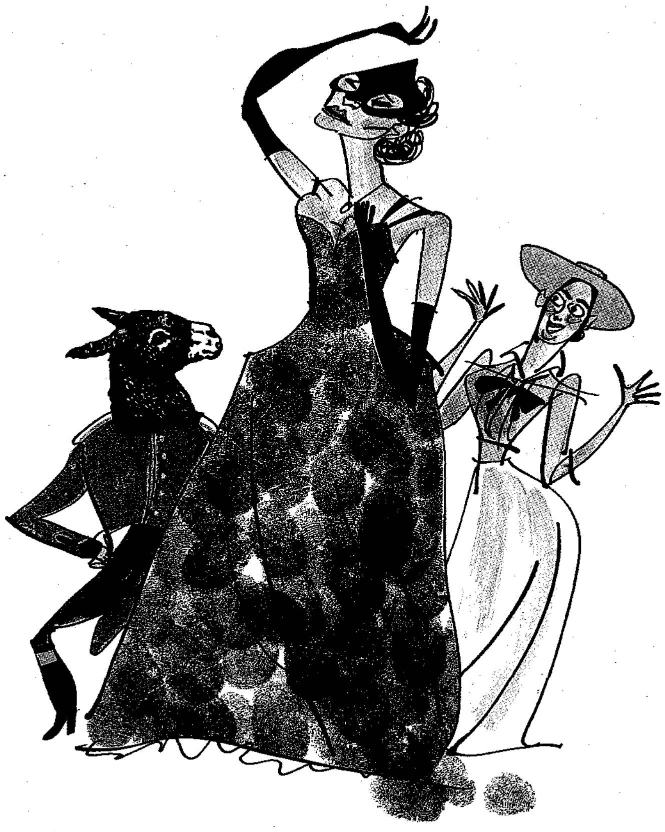
Saturn Returns: A Concert—The composer Adam Guettel and the director Tina Landau, who collaborated on the 1996 musical "Floyd Collins," have joined forces again for this song cycle. In previews through March 29. Opens March 31 at 8. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 260-2400.)

OPENED RECENTLY

Ah, Wilderness!—A Lincoln Center Theatre revival of Eugene O'Neill's comedy, set on Independence Day in 1906. (Vivian Beaumont. 239-6200.)

Amazing Grace—A murderess (Marsha Mason) reëvaluates her life from her cell on death row, in a drama by Michael Cristofer. (Theatre Four, 424 W. 55th St. 239-6200.)

Art—Yasmina Reza's farce is a splendid vehicle for three masterly actors, Victor Garber, Alan Alda, and Alfred Molina. They portray friends whose fifteen-year relationship is threatened when one of them, to the surprise and dismay of the other two, purchases a large white canvas for two hundred thousand francs. The painting is the focus around which they act out farce's eternal threat to identity; their disagreement sends them careering into their own often hilarious defensive postures to preserve their sanity. Elegantly translated, from the French, by Christopher Hampton. Directed by Matthew Warchus. (Reviewed in our issue of 3/23/98.) (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)



Cheek by Jowl's staging of "Much Ado About Nothing."

M.H. JEEVES

BAFO (Best and Final Offer)—Tom Strelich's dark comedy, about four engineers at an aerospace defense contractor in Southern California who are taken hostage by a recently laid-off colleague. The defense-industry lingo rings true, but other dialogue does not, so even at ninety minutes the play feels long and speechy. (American Place Theatre, 111 W. 46th St. 239-6200. Closes April 5.)

The Beauty Queen of Leenane—The precocious Anglo-Irish playwright Martin McDonagh's riveting winter's tale, set in a rural Irish cottage, about an aged mother (the stolid and sensational Anna Manahan) and her virgin forty-year-old daughter (the pale and poignant Marie Mullen), who is trapped in a punishing solitude. It's a simple, primitive story, yet it is filled with complex emotional surprises and reversals. (3/16/98) (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 239-6200.)

Benita Canova—Richard Foreman's latest concoction, a lush exploration of erotic violence, is a memorable, voyeuristic experience. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 533-4650. Closes April 5.)

Cabaret—A Roundabout Theatre revival of the 1966 Kander and Ebb musical. Sam Mendes is the director. (Kit Kat Klub, 124 W. 43rd St. 719-1300.)

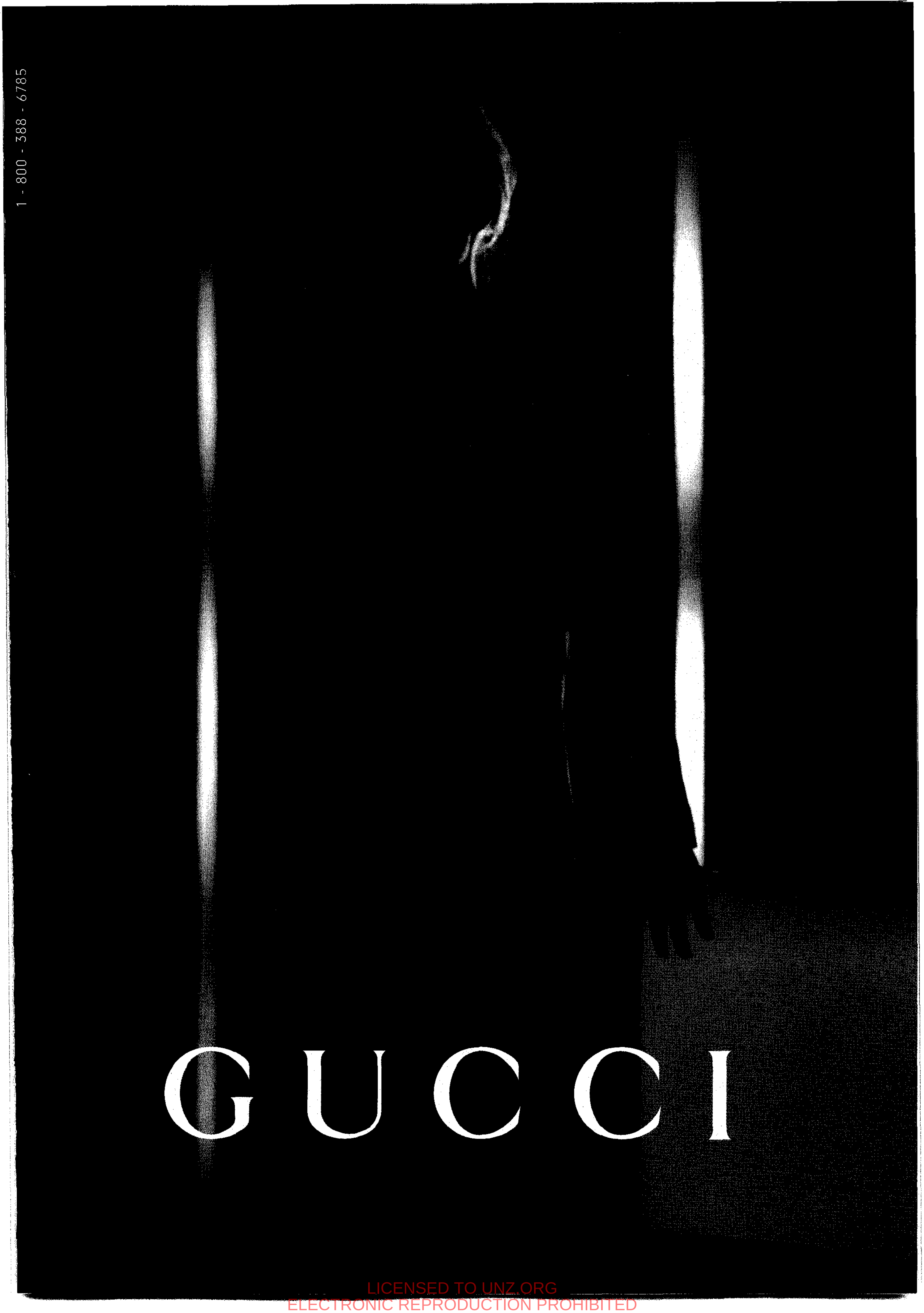
The Diary of Anne Frank—Theatrically, this reworking of the 1955 play by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett, under the direction of James Lapine, is generally fine. But the play's dogged realism is its fundamental flaw: we can't really re-create for ourselves what Anne's dreadful situation was like. (12/15/97) (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Dinah Was—Yvette Freeman portrays the hard-edged jazz singer Dinah Washington, in Oliver Goldstick's play with music. (WPA Theatre, 519 W. 23rd St. 206-0523.)

The Emperor Jones—The Wooster Group's staging of O'Neill's early drama. (Performing Garage, 33 Wooster St. 966-3651. Closes March 29.)

Eyes for Consuela—Sam Shepard's new play, which stars David Strathairn, is an adaptation of Octavio Paz's 1976 short story "The Blue Bouquet." (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

A Flea in Her Ear—Bill Irwin's production of Georges Feydeau's 1907 farce can't live up to the fun of the script, which has been deftly and wittily co-adapted by Jean-Marie Besset and Mark O'Donnell. Part of the problem is down to casting: the ensemble is quite young, and as a group the actors lack both the years and the swank necessary to give a sense of desperation to their capering and a sense of privilege to the vainglory for which the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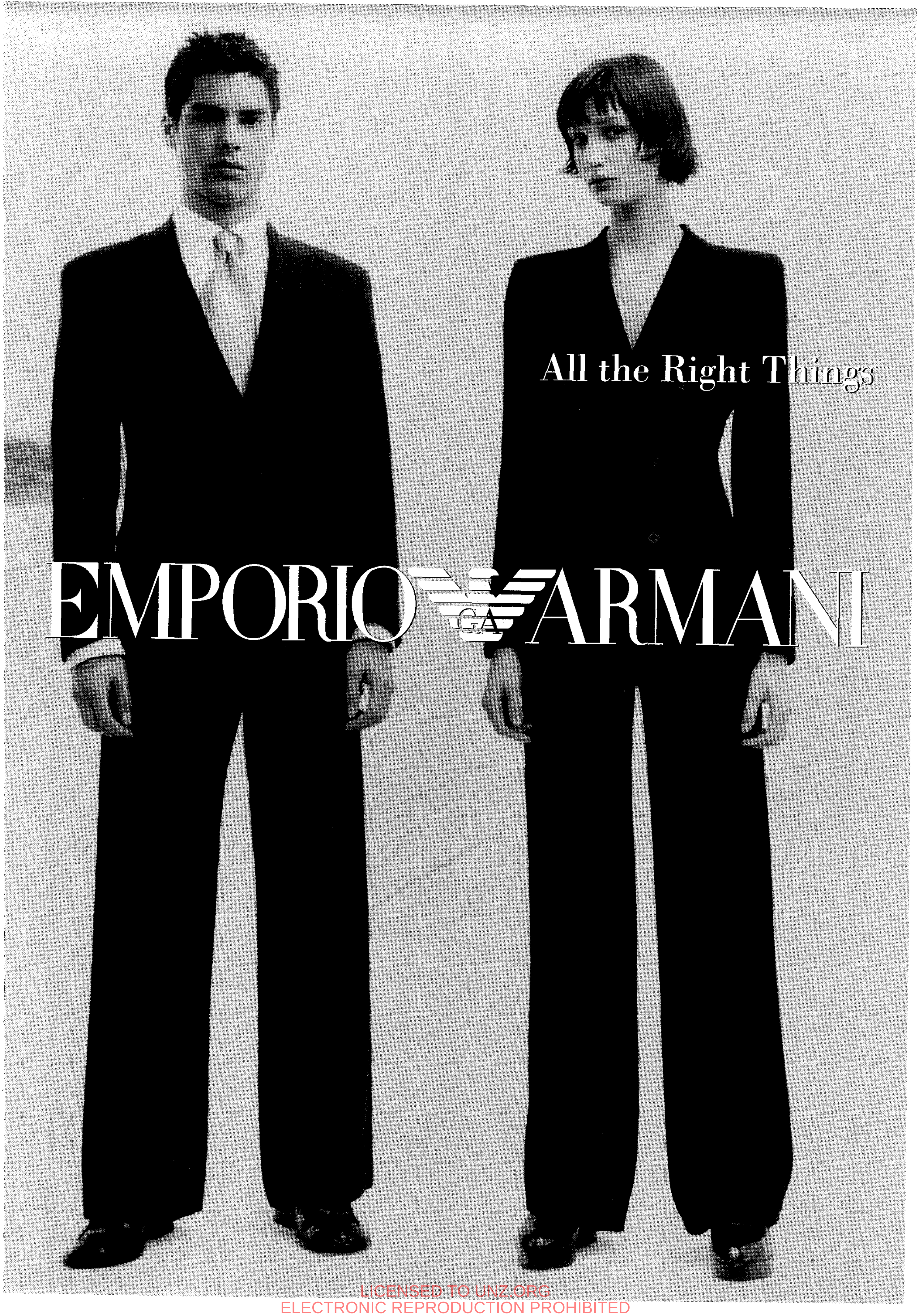

All the Right Things
EMPORIO GA ARMANI

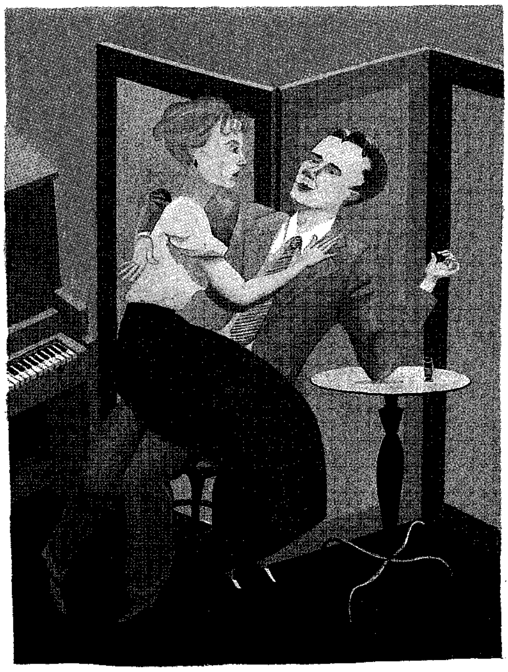
author punishes them. (3/23/98) (Laura Pels, Broadway at 45th St. 719-1300.)

Freak—John Leguizamo ("Spic-O-Rama") portrays dozens of characters in his new one-man comedy. Directed by David Bar Katz. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

Happy Days—Ruth Maleczech and Tom Fitzpatrick star in a Mabou Mines production of Beckett's 1961 play. (Toronado, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 473-1991. Closes April 5.)

Hazelwood Jr. High—The New Group goes site-specific with a play by Rob Urbinati, based on a real-life murder inside a schoolgirl coterie. (Intermediate School 70, 333 W. 17th St. 279-4200. Closes March 29.)

Hedwig and the Angry Inch—Hedwig, as written and portrayed by John Cameron Mitchell, is a sweet transsexual singer from East Berlin, whose cabaret performance cum stadium act becomes a smart, funny, and very moving exploration of the redemptive, if perhaps fleeting, power of love. Stephen Trask's music and lyrics simultaneously celebrate and send up nearly every modern-rock trope, and Peter Askin's staging precisely evokes Hedwig's ragged world. (Jane Street Theatre, Hotel Riverview Ballroom, 113 Jane St. 239-6200.)



Jenn Thompson and Sam Trammell, in Eugene O'Neill's "Ah, Wilderness!," at the Vivian Beaumont.

KATHY OSBORN

Joseph Gabriel Magic '98—Mr. Gabriel comes to New York by way of Las Vegas. (Lamb's, 130 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

The Lion King—The director Julie Taymor has created a theatrical event far more textured and original than the animated film, submerging the audience in a mythic universe; it's like being in a dream awake. The show's high visual style, however, is in sharp contrast to its low verbal one. (11/24/97) (New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.)

Long Day's Journey Into Night—An Irish Rep staging of O'Neill's drama. With Frances Sternhagen and Brian Murray. (132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737.)

Macbeth—Alec Baldwin and Angela Bassett star in George C. Wolfe's staging of Shakespeare's tragedy. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 260-2400. Closes March 29.)

Marc Salem's Mindgames—The clairvoyant claims that his highly entertaining mind-reading act is scam-free. Still, his fascinating "tricks" seem like magic, and at times you feel like you're the only person in the audience who isn't a plant. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

Mizlansky/Zilinsky; or, Schmucks—Davis Mizlansky, played with terrific gusto by Nathan Lane, is a has-been producer trying to float one last get-rich scheme—the sale of a dubious tax shelter—with his urbane partner and erstwhile best friend, Sam Zilinsky (the droll Lewis J. Stadlen), whom he woos, hilariously, into the disastrous scam. Jon Robin Baitz based this high-spirited comedy on his experiences working as a gofer for a two-bit producer in the mid-eighties. Aided by Joe Mantello's elegant direction, he creates a potent atmosphere of affection and regret which is the play's charm. (3/16/98) (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Closes April 4.)

The Mystery of the Rose Bouquet—A psychological thriller by Manuel Puig, presented by INTAR. (420 W. 42nd St. 695-6135. Closes April 12.)

Mystery School—Tyne Daly portrays five women in search of salvation, in a one-woman show written by Paul Selig. (Angel Orensanz Foundation Center for the Arts, 172 Norfolk St., at E. Houston St. 239-6200.)

Never the Sinner—John Logan's 1985 play about Leopold and Loeb sweeps its audience into the boys' twisted friendship without ever losing sight of the brutality of their "crime of the century"—a balancing act that Mr. Logan and the director, Ethan McSweeny, carry off seamlessly. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

The Old Neighborhood—David Mamet's three elegant, autobiographical one-act plays are serious, beautiful, and short—an almost impossible feat these days on Broadway. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Pride's Crossing—Tina Howe's new play is a tedious switchback ride up a mountain of memories from the life of Mabel Tidings Bigelow, who is ninety and once swam the English Channel. Fortunately, Mabel is portrayed by Cherry Jones, who polishes all the tics, fumbles, and feisty outbursts of a nonagenarian to a high shine. Jack O'Brien directed. (1/5/98) (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200. Closes April 5.)

Ragtime—E. L. Doctorow's epic novel chronicling three turn-of-the-century New York families (Wasp, Jewish, and black) is transformed into a historical pageant. It's a big, brave, passionate gamble, masterfully directed by Frank Galati. (2/2/98) (Ford Center for the Performing Arts, 213 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.)

R & J—A promising, if not exactly new, idea—schoolboys escape regimentation and discover their own passion by performing "Romeo and Juliet"—yields a few gripping moments surrounded by a lot of overheated panting, shouting, and foot-stomping. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 354-2220.)

Richard II and **Richard III**—The director Ron Daniels has made a thematic mess of two of Shakespeare's most politically astute—and darkly funny—plays. But Christopher McCann's Richard III is frighteningly seductive, and Neil Patel's versatile sets, along with Donald Holder's lighting effects, create an appropriately moody ambience. (St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 279-4200. Closes April 5.)

Ricky Jay & His 52 Assistants—The sleight-of-hand artist returns to the stage with an encore production of his 1994 one-man show. Directed by David Mamet. (Second Stage, Broadway at 76th St. 787-3471. Closes March 29.)

St. Nicholas—Brian Cox portrays a drama critic having a breakdown, in Conor McPherson's 1997 play. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052. Closes April 5.)

The Scarlet Pimpernel—This new musical, based on the Baroness Orczy novel, has a lot going for it (if you don't count the music and lyrics, which are dreadful): its charismatic star, Douglas Sills, Andrew Jackness's sets, and Jane Greenwood's costumes. Peter Hunt directed. (Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

Secrets Every Smart Traveler Should Know—In this revue inspired by a Fodor's travel guide, the best songs are the ones that manage to be goofy and savvy at the same time. "Customs," bassist Jay Leonhart's deadpan ode to international duties and interrogations, in particular, is a hoot. The show hits turbulence, though, when the humor trades on stereotypes. (Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 799-4599.)

Shopping and Fucking—A small, sketchy piece of British boulevard nihilism, by the first-time playwright Mark Ravenhill, which attempts to dramatize capitalism's warping effects. (2/16/98) (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 460-5475. Closes April 11.)

Side Man—Warren Leight's new play is a nostalgic but never sappy paean to the musical obsession and worldly indifference of mid-century big-band musicians. Though it gives short shrift to the characters, the play invites the audience into the musicians' world, and the cast is good enough to make it come alive. Solidly directed by Michael Mayer. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 279-4200. Closes April 12.)

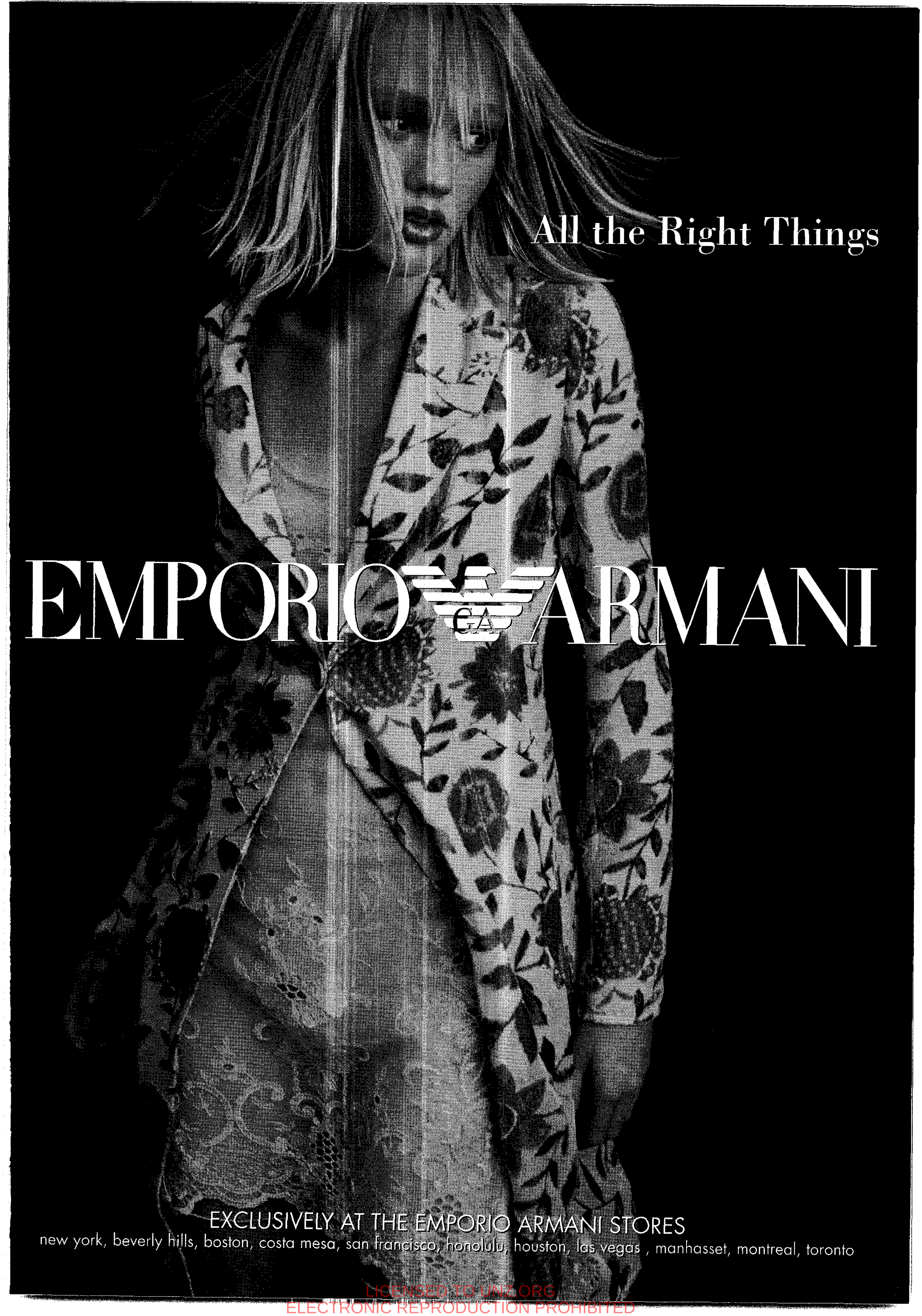
The Sound of Music—The hills are alive (aah-aah-aaaaaaaaah) again. Rebecca Luker is Maria. Susan H. Schulman is the director. (Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

The Sunshine Boys—A revival of Neil Simon's comedy about two irascible old vaudevillians, starring Ye Olde Odd Couple of television, Tony Randall and Jack Klugman. The sandpapery friction that the twosome showed on TV is now reduced to lovability. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Visiting Mr. Green—Jeff Baron's sweet if predictable Upper West Side comedy, about two Jewish men of different generations. Eli Wallach finds great dignity in the title character, an eighty-six-year-old widower. (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 505-0700.)

LONG RUNS

AS BEES IN HONEY DROWN: Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200. . . . **BEAUTY AND THE BEAST:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4100. . . . **BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **BRING IN DA NOISE, BRING IN DA FUNK:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **CHICAGO:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **FORBIDDEN BROADWAY STRIKES BACK!:** Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200. . . . **FOREVER TANGO:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200. . . . **GRANDMA SYLVIA'S FUNERAL:** SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 691-1555. . . . **GROSS INDECENCY: THE THREE TRIALS OF OSCAR WILDE:** Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 420-8000. . . . **HOWARD CRABTREE'S WHEN PIGS FLY:** Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. . . . **HOW I LEARNED TO DRIVE:** Century, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200. . . . **I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200. . . . **JEKYLL & HYDE:** Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE LAST NIGHT OF BALLYHOO:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **LATE NITE CATECHISM:** St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 279-4200. . . . **THE LIFE:** Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy,1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **RENT:** Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000. . . . **1776:** Gershwin, 51st St. west of Broadway. 307-4100. . . . **SMOKEY JOE'S CAFÉ:** Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200. . . . **STOMP:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. 477-2477. . . . **TITANIC:** Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 307-4100. . . . **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. John's Church, 81 Christopher St. 239-6200.


All the Right Things
EMPORIO ARMANI
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EXCLUSIVELY AT THE EMPORIO ARMANI STORES
new york, beverly hills, boston, costa mesa, san francisco, honolulu, houston, las vegas , manhasset, montreal, toronto

DANCE

Eliot Feld's Ballet Tech—March 24-25, March 28, and March 31 at 8: "Umbra Rumba," "The Last Sonata," "Yo Shakespeare," and "Skara Brae." . . . ¶March 26-27 at 8: "Simon Sez," "Charmed Lives," "Re: X," and "The Jig Is Up." . . . ¶March 28-29 at 2 (the family matinées): "Sleep Study," "23 Skidoo," "Joggers," and "Meshugana Dance." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Through April 26.)

Los Muñequitos de Matanzas—The Cuban troupe, which can compress lifetimes of Afro-Cuban rhythms into its masterly renditions of Orisha rituals and rumba, makes two stops in New York with its new program, "Kalenda." (Hostos Center for the Arts, 450 Grand Concourse, at 149th St., the Bronx. 718-518-4455. March 26 at 7:30. . . . Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 864-5400. March 27-28 at 8.)

"Doopy"—Neta Pulvermacher and Dancers première the title work and, to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the state of Israel, the choreographer revives an autobiographical piece, "Five Beds/Children of the Dream," about her early years on a leftist kibbutz. (92nd Street Y Harkness Dance Project, Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 996-1100. March 25-26 and March 28-29 at 8.)

Dance Theatre Workshop—March 25 and March 27 at 8 and March 29 at 3: In her new work "Father/Daughter Dance," Victoria Marks covers ground that most choreographers would tread upon only with a therapist. The piece is performed by bona-fide father-daughter duos (Stuart and Ryn Hodes and Michael and Sharon Hayes alternate performances) and, at press time, included a scene in which the child undresses the parent. Other delicate and fearless works complete the program. . . . ¶March 26 and March 28 at 8: Dan Froot appears in "Froot Alone," a suite of solos in which, more often than not, he accompanies himself on the saxophone. (219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. Marks and Froot continue in repertory through April 3.)

Nancy Meehan Dance Company—For its twenty-sixth season, the nine-member company presents new work and repertory. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. March 27-29 at 8:30.)

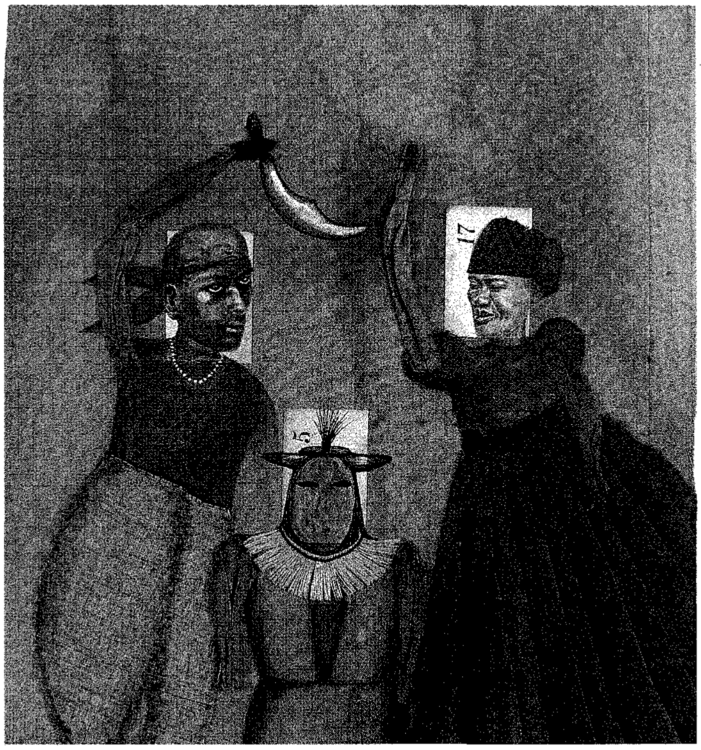
Movement Research Benefit—The great dance incubator celebrates two decades of providing dancers and choreographers with a space to do almost anything. Bill T. Jones, David Dorfman Dance, David Zambrano & Friends, and Simone Forti and Jim Staley, among others, honor the occasion with performances; further improvised festivities follow at Judson Memorial Church. (Pace Downtown Theatre, Spruce St. between Nassau and Gold Sts. For reservations, call 539-2611. March 28 at 8.)

Dance at Holy Trinity—March 26-27 at 8 and March 28 at 3: Three dancers, an actress, and a pianist re-create works by Isadora Duncan. . . . ¶March 28 at 8 and March 29 at 3: Six choreographers create works that treat the classical-ballet vocabulary with varying degrees of respect and irreverence. (Church of the Holy Trinity, 316 E. 88th St. 732-1813.)

Shaolin Monks—Eight monks, residents of the Shaolin monastery at the foot of Mt. Song Shan in China's Henan province, give demonstrations of kung fu (both bare-handed and with spears, tridents, and other ancient weapons) rivalling those they pulled off in their last visit, during the 1996 Lollapalooza tour. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 307-7171. March 26 at 8.)

Second Avenue Dance Company—The graduating class of New York University's dance program performs in new work by choreographers Ronald K. Brown, Danial Shapiro and Joanie Smith, and Doug Varone. (Tisch School of the Arts, 111 Second Ave., at 6th St. 998-1982. March 26-27 and March 29-30 at 8 and March 28 at 2 and 8.)

"Geography, Part II"—The choreographer Ralph Lemon presents a work in progress, the middle portion of a trilogy whose first segment was seen last December at BAM. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. March 26-27 at 7:45.)



Afro-Cuban dance with Los Muñequitos de Matanzas.

DEBORAH BARRETT

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

Ben Allison and **Tom Varner**—Two leading lights of the new-jazz scene, bassist Allison and French-horn player Varner, head up cutting-edge ensembles. Allison's Mingus-like womp generates a goosing swing; Varner's virtuosity gives his outside-the-mainstream horn the fluency of a bounding trombone. (New School Jazz Performance Space, 55 W. 13th St. 995-1552. March 26 at 8.)

Marcus Roberts—The jazz pianist, in the second part of his solo program "Evolution of Blues and Swing." (Kaplan Penthouse, Rose Building, Lincoln Center. 721-6500. March 26-27 at 8.)

"CuBop Live!"—As long as Tito Puente's timbales flow with zesty rhythms, Cubop—the late-forties Cuban-groove-meets-bebop amalgam that became the foundation of contemporary salsa—will live on. The patriarch of New York's Latin-music scene is accompanied by the vocalists Graciela and Jose (El Canario) Alberto. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. March 28 at 8.)

CLUBS

(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type indicates some of the more notable performers in town. Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

Arlene Grocery, 95 Stanton St., between Ludlow and Orchard Sts. (358-1633)—March 26: Topnotch rock and funk with **FONTAINE.** The seven-piece all-women combo **HOMER EROTIC** brings its funky, conga-laced jams and considerable downtown following in on March 27.

Bottom Line, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—March 25: **CLARENCE (GATEMOUTH) BROWN.** He's past seventy, but you'd never know it from his sinewy sound. Like virtually every other Texas blues guitarist of the past half-century, he owes much to T-Bone Walker, but, unlike his fellow-disciples, he's always sought to expand the vocabulary of the blues, mixing in elements of country, Cajun, and jazz. And when he picks up that electric fiddle, watch out. March 28: **ALEJANDRO ESCOVEDO** and **PETER CASE:** two great songwriters you've never heard of on one tiny stage. Call Escovedo the Latin Elvis Costello: his world-weary homilies come packaged in garage-rock cinder, and his voice has more tar than a pack of Marlboros. Case is of the Southern California songwriting school: his anthems juxtapose a choirboy's voice with noirish tales of redemption.

Brownies, 169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—March 27: Scottish Chicagoan Chris Connelly brings his latest outfit, **THE BELLS,** to town on March 27. With his latest release, "The Ultimate Seaside Companion," Connelly continues his flight from the industrial bile of his eighties bands Ministry and Revolting Cocks toward brilliantly orchestrated pop in the manner of Bowie or Nick Drake. With fellow-Chicagoan **ARCHER PREWITT,** of the Sea and Cake, and Australian pop master **RICHARD DAVIES.**

Coney Island High, 15 St. Marks Pl. (674-7959)—March 30-31: **THE FALL,** one of the few original New Wave bands that has managed to remain consistently unpredictable and biting throughout the past eighteen years.

Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—March 25: **PROPELLERHEADS.** The latest wonderment from the increasingly fertile contemporary English pop scene, this collective electrocutes Bacharach-flavored schmalz with high-voltage drum-and-bass grooves. It's chilly but eminently danceable stuff, the kind of music one suspects Madonna performs aerobics to. March 31: **LOS FABULOSOS CADILLACS** kick off their U.S. tour. This Argentinean rock combo has finally found crossover (and Grammy) success with its eleventh album, "Fabulosos Calavera," a propulsive mix of punk, salsa, samba, and reggae.

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—March 29: **THE BELLS** and **ARCHER PREWITT.** (See Brownies.)

Mercury Lounge, 217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—March 26: **DAVID POE'S** eponymous major-label début is filled with intimate, elliptical tales of love and bitterness. Sounds pretty standard, but with guitar help from Marc Ribot and production by T Bone Burnett and a knack for desolate honesty ("I know you're happier than me to be alone at your window"), Poe's got a leg up on all the modern troubadours of loss. March 28-29: Two great acts with monosyllabic, sexually connotative names: **COME** (Lower East Side post-grunge swoon) and **FUCK** (San Francisco alternative pop). March 31: As guitarist for the Smashing Pumpkins (and sometime runway model), **JAMES IHA** has always been overshadowed by that band's iconoclastic leader, Billy Corgan. Most of the time Iha stood around and looked groovy, making interesting, if unremarkable, sounds with his instrument. Now on "Let It Come Down," his first solo album, Iha reveals that he wasn't just posing—he really has nothing to say. At least he looks groovier than ever.

Tramps, 51 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—March 25: **IVY**, a low-key, European-inflected pop outfit featuring French singer Dominique Durand and Adam Schlesinger, who's half of the equally appealing Fountains of Wayne. Headlining the evening is the Manchester rock quartet **SPACE MONKEYS.** March 28: Old-school hip-hoppers **EPMD.**

Wetlands, 161 Hudson St. (966-4225)—March 27-28: **STRANGEFOLK** comes in with its extended-jam world view.

ONLY CONNECT

Quack Watch (http://www.quackwatch.com)—Testimonials of the sort one finds on late-night infomercials and in health-food stores—personal appeals that end with a pitch—are the very stuff of countless Web sites. Its wide-open nature has made the Web prime real estate for purveyors of medical nostrums and nonsense, and the thing that many of these sites have in common is a sense of conviction: most quacks believe in what they do. As an antidote, Dr. Stephen Barrett (a retired psychiatrist and the author of "The Health Robbers: A Close Look at Quackery in America") brings his own sense of righteousness to the Web with this consumer-friendly site, part of his crusade to combat misinformation regarding homeopathy, holistic dentistry, weight-control gimmicks, and other dubious medical practices.

While Quack Watch posts specific alerts (especially in its searchable forum, the Health Fraud Discussion List), it mostly tries to provide the user with a working B.S. detector. Under the heading How Quackery Sells, Barrett includes a list of alternative medicine's buzz phrases ("balancing the body's chemistry," "releasing nerve energy") and promises ("We attack the cause of the disease," "We treat the whole patient") that often spell danger. Though he is something of a zealot (detractors who visit the site vilify him as a puppet of the A.M.A., a lackey of the drug companies, and worse), the evidence Barrett provides of quackery's victims justifies his ire. One story tells of a twenty-four-year-old woman who suffered a stroke after a chiropractic neck manipulation and died three days later. Another concerns a woman who consulted a "naturopath" about a bump on her nose, only to be diagnosed with cancer and given a black herbal salve to apply to the area. Within a week of doing so, a large part of her face had fallen off, requiring seventeen plastic surgeries in a period of three years. The kicker? She never had cancer. And don't even ask about the practitioners of "the grape cure." Quackery, this site reminds us, preys on the desperate, and while science does not have all the answers (as practitioners of alternative medicine like to remind us), it can, at least, provide the means for finding them.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—Professional hipster **BOB DOROUGH** (in March 25-26) has covered some ground in his time as a bebopping singer, songwriter, and pianist. Baby-boomer jazz fans know his "Blue Xmas" collaboration with Miles Davis; their children recognize Dorough's "Schoolhouse Rock" and "Sesame Street" ditties. On hand to celebrate his recent Blue Note album, "Right On My Way Home," are saxophone

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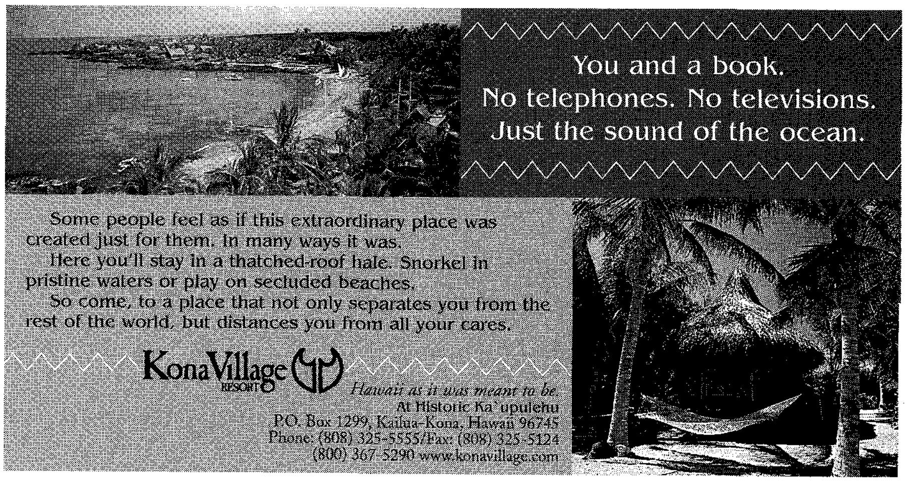

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giant **JOE LOVANO** and drummer **AL HAREWOOD.** Veteran tenor-sax man **DEWEY REDMAN** drops in with his quartet March 27-28. Dining.

FireBird Café, 363 W. 46th St. (586-0244)—The madcap trio **FASCINATING AIDA,** which has spent the past fifteen years or so collecting a cult following in London, is strutting its stuff at this intimate club through April 12.

Iridium, 44 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through March 29: For a long time, no one paid much attention to **CECIL TAYLOR.** He was a freak who played the way that Bartók or Hindemith might have played had they been jazz musicians. But masters often need apostles to prepare their way, and that is what the pianists McCoy Tyner and Keith Jarrett have been doing—knowingly or not—for the past few decades. Once in a while Taylor opens up enough to reveal his roots, and you can hear traces of Ellington, Gershwin, and Monk. Mondays belong to electric-guitar innovator **LES PAUL.** Dining.

Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—Through March 29: **STEVE KUHN,** a marvellous pianist who finds new vistas in old standards, backed up by a first-rate rhythm section: bassist **DAVID FINCK** and drummer **KENNY WASHINGTON.**

Knickerbocker, 33 University Pl., at 9th St. (228-8490)—March 25-28: Pianist **JUDY CARMICHAEL** strides like Fats Waller's long-lost daughter, and, in saxophonist **MIKE HASHIM,** she's got a partner hooked into her pre-swing groove.

Rainbow & Stars, 30 Rockefeller Plaza (632-5000)—The revue **"RHYTHM ON THE RAINBOW . . . THE HOT HARMONIES OF THE BOSWELL SISTERS,"** starring Dee Hoty, Sally Mayes, and Nancy Opel, continues through March 28. **MICHAEL FEINSTEIN** takes over starting March 31.

Sweet Basil, 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—The **PAUL MOTIAN ELECTRIC BEBOP BAND** is in through March 29. This two-guitar-and-two-sax band is far more successful than you might think. A smart selection of tunes, from Parker and Mingus classics to drummer Motian's own moody originals, gets serious and energetic treatment. This is not fusion. Repeat: This is not fusion. Dining.

Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through March 29: Jazz doesn't want for master pianists, but there's only one **TOMMY FLANAGAN.** Tone, touch, taste, technique—he's got it all. With Flanagan's imaginative repertoire and the almost alarming unity of his trio, it doesn't get any better. The **VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA** holds sway on Mondays.

Zinno, 126 W. 13th St. (924-5182)—Through March 28: The jazz clarinet has been injected with new life in the work of virtuosos like Ken Peplowski and Marty Ehrlich, but the state-of-the-art work remains that of **KENNY DAVERN:** for the past four decades he has tapped into the spirits of licorice-stick iconoclasts such as Pee Wee Russell by tempering a quirky individualism with sterling technique. Davern is accompanied by **JOHN BUNCH** (piano) and **TONY DE NICOLA** (drums). Dining.

Los Fabulosos Cadillacs, at Irving Plaza.

ZOHAR LAZAR

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—"Augustin Pajou, Royal Sculptor." Pajou (1730-1809) was one of the stars of the waning ancien régime, but in this country he is almost entirely unknown. This exhibition should go some way toward rectifying that neglect. His works seem to display both the spirit of the rococo and that of the neoclassicism that was ascendant in the late eighteenth century. Perhaps the most accessible works for contemporary viewers are Pajou's portrait busts, which even at their most formal never lose the sense of a vivid personality. Through May 24. . . . ¶ Pierre-Paul Prud'hon (1758-1823) never achieved the fame of the leading neoclassical painter of his day, Jacques-Louis David, but oddly enough he remained popular during the Romantic period, while the greater artist fell out of fashion. This exhibition of paintings and works on paper is exemplary in that it brings an underappreciated artist to contemporary attention without glossing over his deficiencies. Many of the pictures here are awkward and unconvincing—in a word, academic. A few stand out as especially brilliant, for example, "Justice and Divine Vengeance Pursuing Crime" (1808), perhaps Prud'hon's masterpiece; some of the portraits; and the drawings of nudes, which have always been prized by connoisseurs. Through June 7. . . . ¶ "When Silk Was Gold: Central Asian and Chinese Textiles in the Metropolitan and Cleveland Museums of Art." Through May 17. . . . ¶ "Paul Strand Circa 1916." Through May 31. . . . ¶ "The Nature of Islamic Ornament, Part One: Calligraphy." Through June 28. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:15, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—For an artist whose roots are in sixties and seventies Conceptualism, Chuck Close enjoys unusually wide popularity. The early black-and-white blowup portraits of friends in the downtown art scene—none flattering, all overwhelming—are not easy to look at, which attests to their strength. The later works—more portraits of friends famous and obscure—are characterized by modular blobs of intense color, which gives them a trippy, psychedelic splendor. Through May 26. . . . ¶ "Artists and Subjects: Picasso to Stella" examines the guises of twentieth-century portraiture. Through May 25. . . . ¶ "Alvar Aalto: Between Humanism and Materialism," a centennial exhibition that includes sketches, photographs, and maquettes of architectural projects by the Finnish modernist. Through May 19. . . . ¶ A retrospective of the works of Fernand Léger follows the metamorphoses of the French painter (1881-1955), from Fauvist to Cubist to Social Realist. Through May 12. . . . ¶ Twenty-six recently acquired photographs by Garry Winogrand are on view. Through May 31. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 6; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:30.)

Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—"China: 5,000 Years" is an impressive survey of art in nearly every medium; it includes some of the country's greatest masterpieces. The selection ranges from the Neolithic to the dynastic era and has no particular focus; with works of this quality, however, no one's complaining. China's preoccupation with its own past is a subtle, recurring theme, and star power is supplied by four of the famous life-size earthenware warriors, and a magnificent horse, from the tomb of Qin Shihuangdi, discovered in Xi'an in 1977. Through June 3. . . . ¶ "After 'Mountains and Sea': Frankenthaler 1956-59." Through May 3. . . . ¶ "Visions of Paris: Robert Delaunay's Series." Through May 24. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 10 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 8.)

Guggenheim Museum SoHo, 575 Broadway, at Prince St. (423-3500)—"A Century in Crisis" comprises the contemporary portion of the institution's blockbuster exhibition "China: 5,000 Years." Chinese art in the past century has been invaded by Western influences, typically decades after the style has been abandoned in Europe and America. Although some of the work has considerable graphic power, much of it is problematic. For example, Cheng Zhang's "Rustic Scene," from 1930, is naturalistically detailed and drawn in Western perspective, which makes it sit uneasily in the traditional vertical-scroll format. The terrifying tackiness of works from the Cultural Revolution poses a real challenge: what is one to make of the portrait of a young woman doctor on a fisherman's wharf, simpering as though she'd stepped out of a Norman Rockwell painting? Through May 25. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Saturday evenings until 8.)

Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—The current Bill Viola retrospective is quite an installational feat, given that much of this pioneer video artist's work incorporates sound and image in complex, quasi-sculptural settings. Viola's work is often very noisy: keeping the experience of various pieces separate is difficult, and at times the show becomes an auditory mishmash. This isn't necessarily a fault, since assaulting the senses is part of his program. There is a palpable feeling of excitement here, and it's better to just go with the flow rather than trying to chop the show up into more easily digestible segments. Through May 10. . . . ¶ "Arthur Dove: A Retrospective," the first major exhibition in more than twenty years to examine the work of the Empire State abstractionist. Through April 12. (Open Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

American Museum of Natural History, Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—"The Nature of Diamonds" looks at many facets of the adamantine stone, from its birth in volcanic fissures to its eventual rise to the heads of heads of state (e.g., on the crown of Peter the Great, displayed in the exhibition's walk-in diamond vault). Through April 26. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Brooklyn Museum of Art, Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—"Scattered Petals, Fallen Leaves, Shards of Glass: The Work of Bing Hu." Through May 10. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays, 11 to 9; and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

Fashion Institute of Technology, Seventh Ave. at 27th St. (217-5800)—"Norman Norell," a retrospective devoted to the designer (1900-1972) known as the "American Balenciaga," includes examples of his exquisitely cut ready-to-wear clothes as well as his elaborately sequinned "mermaid" dresses. Through April 18. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, noon to 8; Saturdays, 10 to 5.)

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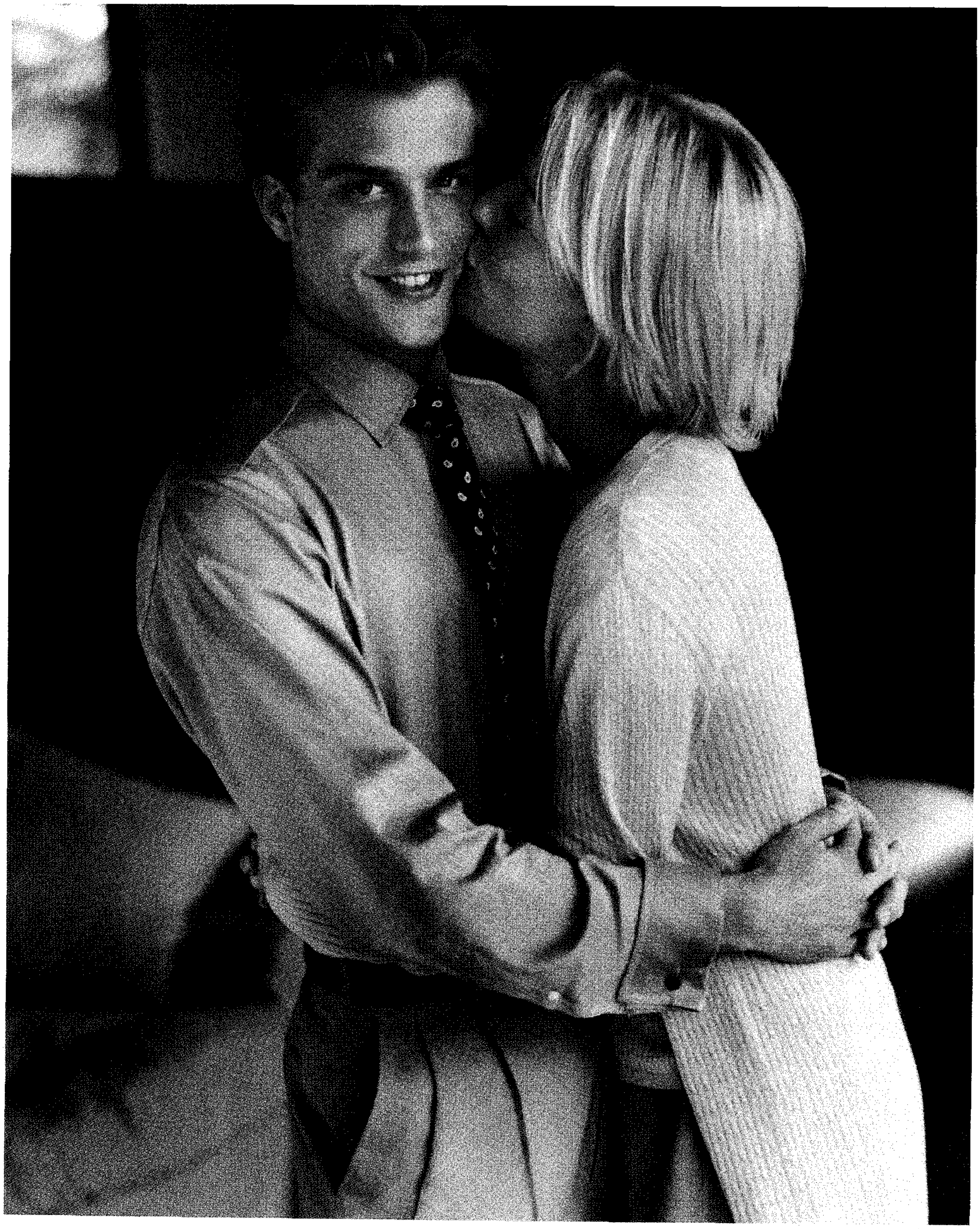

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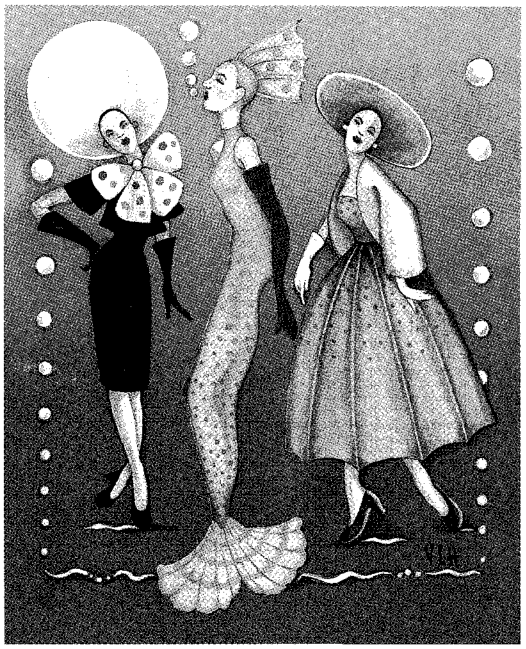
GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.)

Mary Frank—These irregularly shaped panels and hinged triptychs, which the artist calls "inscapes," are loosely executed, almost funky images of nightmares: an owl-headed man, rendered in shocking-blue impasto and outlined in electric red, falls heavily through space; a female figure frantically bails water from a boat sinking in a poisonous red sea. The surfaces are as violent as the colors, occasionally sprinkled with pumice or scraped with a comb. These paintings convey narratives that are as urgent as they are elusive. Through April 4. (DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 247-2111.)

Robert Greene/Johan Creten—The artist's first New York show in more than six years is a strange mélange of decorative abstractions in springlike colors and faux-naïve landscapes with tiny human figures enjoying simple outdoor pleasures. But Greene's idyllic paradise is never as innocent as it seems: "Plunge" depicts a boy and his dog in midair, having just leaped off a high bridge into a river. Or are they flying?/"Odore di Femmina" is the first American exhibition by this refined Belgian sculptor, comprising eight life-size terra-cotta female torsos covered in sinuous ceramic roses. One group of three black torsos streaked with scarlet has a sinister, menacing beauty, and another, in unglazed stoneware, has an evocative, earthy simplicity. Both shows through March 28. (Robert Miller, 41 E. 57th St. 980-5454.)



Norman Norell designs, at F.I.T.

VIRGINIA HATLEY

Félicien Rops (1833-98)—Louche and inventive drawings by the Belgian artist and friend of Baudelaire, Flaubert, *et al.* In their refinement and syphilis-inspired anxieties, Rops's scenes of casual priapism are in keeping with the obsessions of his confrères. It's also easy to spot similarities with more contemporary artists, such as Carroll Dunham or the Chapman brothers, who also depict phalluses with a Tourette-ish frequency. Through April 25. (Shepherd, 21 E. 84th St. 861-4050.)

Volker Stelzmann—This exhibition of new work by a Berlin-based figurative painter is grandiosely titled "German Expressionism Today"; while these grotesque street scenes do have faint echoes of the Expressionists' bold compositions and vivid use of color, they are far too fussily painted to be legitimate descendants of Beckmann and Kokoschka. There's a strong emphasis on hip fashion: women in tight microminis strike angular poses, looking alternately anguished and stoned. Through March 28. (Forum, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 355-4545.)

Paul Waldman—"Paintings: 2000 B.C.–2000 A.D.," another show whose grand proclamation is only partly (and in this case metaphorically) achieved. Waldman's visionary landscapes, some with rainbows and others with rows of spooky-looking houses, are populated by solitary female nudes, their backs to the viewer, rendered in luscious, luminous pastel shades. Through March 28. (Helman, 20 W. 57th St. 245-2888.)

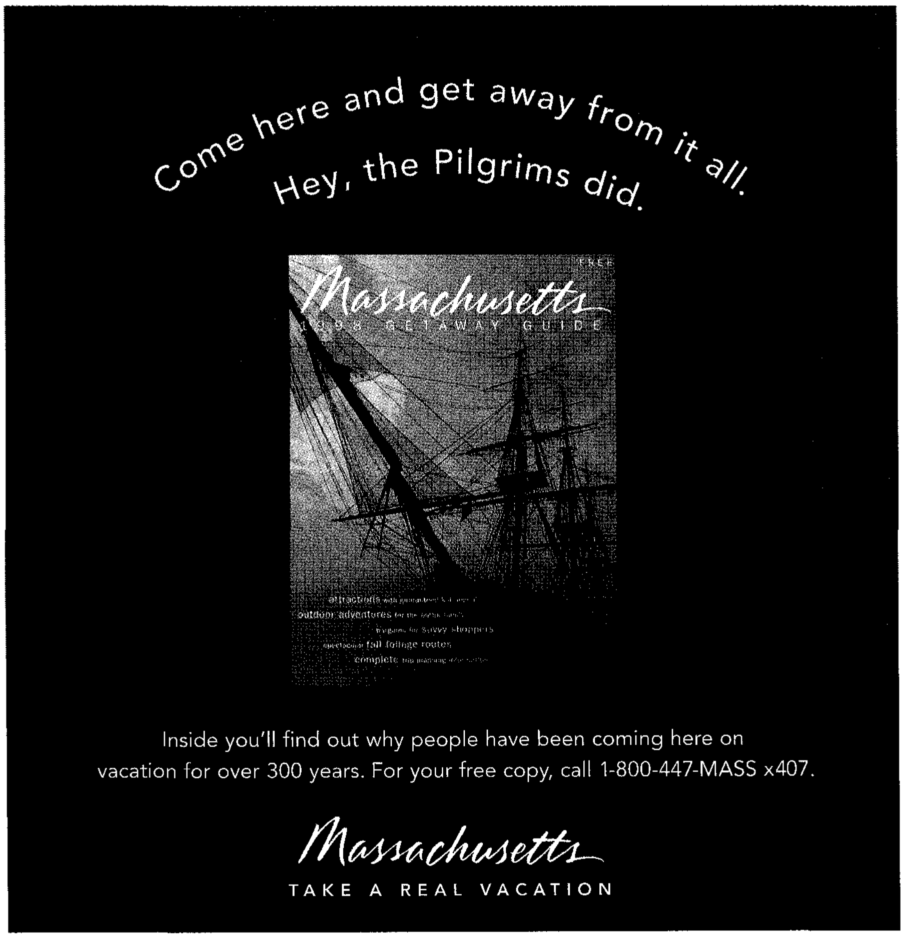
H. C. Westermann (1922-81)—A charming selection of works by a witty West Coast master of conceptual funk, from every period of his career, in many media: enigmatic ink-and-watercolor drawings, some recalling the sloppy insouciance of psychedelic comics; a dizzy-making Op-art box; and carefully crafted sculptures in wood and metal. One consists of two huge ice-cream cones, dipped in tar, mounted in a vitrine meticulously inlaid with maple and ebony and backed by a lyrical sky painted by the artist's wife, Joanna Beall. Through March 28. (Parrasch, 20 W. 57th St. 246-5360.)

"Giacometti and Japanese Sculpture"—An almost excessively elegant installation housing just two works of art: a bronze sculpture by Alberto Giacometti—a frontal, standing nude from 1953, somewhat more voluptuously wrought than the emaciated figures the artist is best known for—and an exquisite Japanese gilt bronze of a bodhisattva, from the early Nara period (seventh century A.D.). The two works don't particularly resonate, but each deserves the deep contemplation the exhibition invites. Through April 25. (Yoshii, 20 W. 57th St. 265-8876.)

Short List—**QUENTIN BELL,** Davis & Langdale, 231 E. 60th St. 838-0333. Through April 18. . . . **THERESA BERNSTEIN,** Whalen, 24 W. 57th St. 397-9700. Through April 18. . . . **JUDITH COTTON,** Graham, 1014 Madison Ave., at 78th St. 535-5767. Through April 11. . . . **JEAN FAUTRIER,** Werner, 21 E. 67th St. 988-1623. Open Mondays; through April 11. . . . **JOHN FERREN,** Snyder, 20 W. 57th St. 262-1160. Through April 25. . . . **KATHRYN FREEMAN,** Tatistcheff, 50 W. 57th St. 664-0907. Through March 31. . . . **GIAMBOLOGNA,** Salander-O'Reilly, 20 E. 79th St. 879-6606. Open Mondays; through April 4. . . . **LEON GOLDIN** and **ANNE RYAN,** Kraushaar, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 307-5730. Both shows through April 4. . . . **ADOLPH GOTTLIEB,** Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St. 794-0550. Through April 4. . . . **GEORGE MCNEIL,** ACA, 41 E. 57th St. 644-8300. Through March 28. . . . **MARISOL,** Marlborough, 40 W. 57th St. 541-4900. Open Mondays; through March 28. . . . **BEATRICE WOOD** and **ELIE NADELMAN,** Clark, 24 W. 57th St. 246-2205. Both shows through April 4.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Vito Acconci—A museum-quality show of three mid-seventies installations, complex son-et-lumière works that incorporate multiple projections, video monitors, crude plywood sculptural props, and speaker systems through which the artist spouts rambling, obscure, yet often riveting texts. The impact of these works hasn't dimmed over three decades, but they do require a patient viewer willing to do the work of



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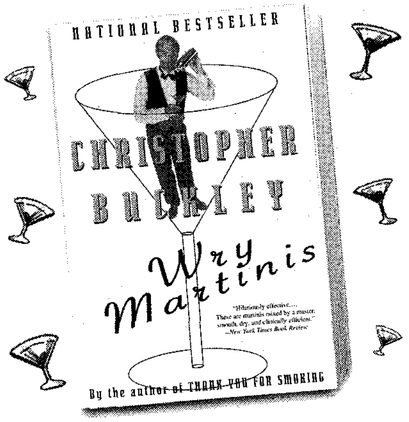

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looking and listening. Through April 1. (Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 206-9300.)

Matthew Benedict—"The Magus and Other Tales," large-scale gouaches and mounted embroideries by a young artist with a keen interest in myth and theatricality. In one picture, a sea captain is at the wheel of his ship during a raging storm; for some reason, he is outfitted with a mitre and crook. Benedict's works are also charged with a muted but unmistakable homoeroticism. Through April 25. (Alexander and Bonin, 132 Tenth Ave., at 18th St. 367-7474.)

Alice Neel (1900-84)—"Men in Suits," a series of paintings from the fifties through the seventies of just what the exhibition title promises, all rendered in the artist's signature style of ironic Expressionism. The only double portrait in the show—of the art critics David Bourdon and Gregory Battcock—really stands out: the former wears a suit, but the latter appears in a white tank top, yellow briefs, and lurid red socks. Through April 25. (Cheim & Read, 521 W. 23rd St. 242-7727.)

Thomas Ruff—"Plakats," a series of photomontages by this prominent student of Bernd and Hilla Becher. Ruff first achieved fame in the eighties for documentary photographic work that expanded upon the example of his teachers in diverse ways. In these new computer-manipulated images, Ruff seems to be reaching farther back into German modernist art history, namely to the incendiary photomontages of the Berlin Dadaist John Heartfield. But given Ruff's large self-awareness quotient, there is no escaping the irony of these "political" works. Through March 28. (303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 255-1121.)

Short List—**RICCI ALBENDA,** Kreps, 529 W. 20th St. 741-8849. Through April 4. . . . **MARY HEILMANN,** Hearn, 530 W. 22nd St. 727-7366. Through April 18. . . . **RONALD JONES,** Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 206-7100. Through April 11. . . . **JOSEPH LOGAN,** Clementine, 526 W. 26th St. 243-5937. Through March 28. . . . **SHARON LOUDEN,** Anderson, 453 W. 17th St. 463-0970. Through April 4. . . . **JOHN LOVETT AND ALESSANDRO CODAGNONE,** XL, 504 W. 22nd St. 462-4111. Through April 12. . . . **JASON MIDDLEBROOK,** Martz, 529 W. 20th St. 206-3686. Through April 18. . . . **TOM MOODY** and **DAVID CLARKSON,** Eller, 529 W. 20th St. 206-6411. Both shows through April 18. . . . **MICHAEL ST. JOHN,** Team, 527 W. 26th St. 279-9219. Through April 18. . . . **RANDY WALZ,** Morris, 465 W. 23rd St. 727-2752. Through April 18.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

John Chamberlain—A pair of sculptures of crushed and painted steel, "The Privet" and "The Hedge," sixty and fifty feet long, respectively, which the artist calls "Fauve Landscapes." Through April 25. (Pace Wildenstein, 142 Greene St. 431-9224.)

"Archigram"—Drawings, maquettes, installations, and other re-creations of the capsule structures, plug-in environments, and walking cities, etc., envisioned by counterculture architects in the sixties and early seventies. Through April 25. (Thread Waxing Space, 476 Broadway. 966-9520.)

An untitled photogravure by Paul Strand, at the Met.

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Short List—**BERNARD CHAET,** New York Studio School, 8 W. 8th St. 673-6466. Through April 4. . . . **CARL FUDGE,** Feldman, 31 Mercer St. 226-3232. Through April 25. . . . **ELLEN GALLAGHER,** Gagosian, 136 Wooster St. 228-2828. Through April 11. . . . **IRENE HARDWICKE,** Bodell, 13 E. 7th St. 477-1820. Through March 30. . . . **MICHELE HARVEY,** Bridgewater/Lustberg, 560 Broadway. 941-6355. Through April 18. . . . **JENIFER KOBYLARZ,** Thorp, 103 Prince St. 431-6880. Through April 4. . . . **SHARON LOCKHART,** Petzel, 26 Wooster St. 334-9466. Through April 4. . . . **LIZA LOU,** P.P.O.W, 476 Broome St. 941-8642. Through April 18. . . . **CHRISTOPHER LUCAS,** McIntyre, 45 Crosby St. 334-9666. Through March 28. . . . **JOHN L. MOORE,** M-13, at 72 Greene St. 925-3007. Through April 4. . . . **CORNELIA PARKER,** Deitch Projects, 76 Grand St. 343-7300. Through April 18. . . . **DANIEL REYNOLDS,** Deven Golden, 16 Mercer St. 334-3124. Through April 4. . . . **ULRICH RUCKREIM,** Ace, 275 Hudson St. 255-5599. Through March 28. . . . **LINDA STOJAK,** Haller, 560 Broadway. 219-2500. Through April 28. . . . **CAROL SZYMANSKI,** Wimmer, 560 Broadway. 274-0274. Through April 18. . . . **RUBÉN TORRES-LLORCA,** Knowlton, 568 Broadway. 966-2625. Through April 25. . . . **JULIAN TRIGO,** Luhring Augustine, 130 Prince St. 219-9600. Through April 11. . . . **RICK UNRUH,** Hurley, 568 Broadway. 343-8930. Through April 15.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Sotheby's—The auction-and-antique industry's Asia Week continues apace. March 25: A sale of Japanese art, with a separate auction of a hundred and thirty-three inro, tiny lacquered boxes worn about the waist to carry herbs and medicine. . . . ¶ March 26: Indian, Himalayan, and Southeast Asian pieces. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

Christie's—March 25: Chinese ceramics, bronzes, and other works. . . . ¶ March 26: Japanese art. (Park Ave. at 59th St. 546-1000.)

Phillips—A sale of Japanese, Southeast Asian, and Chinese pieces. (406 E. 79th St. 570-4830. March 30.)

Doyle—An auction of Asian art. (175 E. 87th St. 427-2730. March 31.)

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International Asian Art Fair—The third installment, with dealers from Europe, Asia, and the United States. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. March 27-April 1, with a benefit preview March 26. For information, call 642-8572.)

Arts of Pacific Asia Show—A small but choice assemblage of sixty-six dealers. (69th Regiment Armory, Lexington Ave. at 25th St. March 26-29. For information, call 683-2434.)

Triple Pier Expo—The first of two weekends for antique hunters with comfortable shoes. (Piers 88, 90, and 92, Twelfth Ave. between 48th and 52nd Sts. March 28-29. For information, call 255-0020.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

Ilse Bing (1899-1998)—Vintage prints by the avant-garde photographer, who died just two weeks ago. The show was to have been in celebration of her ninety-ninth birthday (March 23). Through May 2. (Houk, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 750-7070.)

Andrew Bush—Three shelves of fetishistic "Envelopes"—trompe-l'oeil images in old printer's frames—are the coup de théâtre of this teasing mini-retrospective. Through April 4. (Saul, 560 Broadway. 431-0747.)

Susan Unterberg—"Water Dreams," a suite of well-executed, pastoral meditations on landscape. Through April 4. (Richardson, 560 Broadway. 343-1255.)

"Larry Burrows at War: Vietnam, 1962-71"/"In Country: Vietnam Revisited"—Thirty color and black-and-white pictures by the intrepid war photographer, who was killed in action./Photographs taken since 1993 by Mitch Epstein, Lois Conner, An-My Lê, and Abby Robinson. Both shows through April 11. (Laurence Miller, 138 Spring St. 226-1220.)

International Center of Photography—"Micha Bar-Am: An Israeli Photobiography." Through May 31. (1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. 860-1777. Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

International Center of Photography Midtown—"Robert Capa: Photographs," a retrospective of the war correspondent's career. Through June 7. (Sixth Ave. at 43rd St. 860-1777. Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

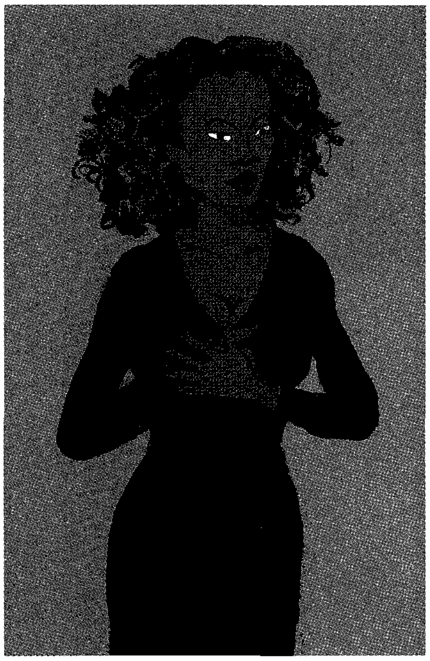
Short List—**edouard-denis baldus,** Alan Klotz/Photocollect, 22 E. 72nd St. 327-2211. Closed Tuesdays; through April 18. . . . **uta barth,** Bonakdar Jancou, 521 W. 21st St. 925-8035. Through April 23. . . . **cecil beaton,** Staley-Wise, 560 Broadway. 966-6223. Through April 18. . . . **james casebere,** Sean Kelly, 43 Mercer St. 343-2405. Through April 25. . . . **robert cumming,** Borden, 560 Broadway. 431-0166. Through April 4. . . . **andreas feininger,** SoHo Triad Fine Arts, 107 Grand St. 965-9500. Open daily; through April 12. . . . **charles hagen,** Morthland, 225 Tenth Ave., at 23rd St. 242-7767. Open Sundays, noon to 5; through April 26. . . . **simpson kalisher,** De Lellis, 47 E. 68th St. 327-1482. Through April 25. . . . **alexander liberman,** Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St. 517-3766. Through April 18. . . . **o. winston link,** Mann, 42 E. 76th St. 570-1223. Through May 2. . . . **ralph eugene meatyard,** Greenberg, 120 Wooster St. 334-0010. Through April 25. . . . **august sander,** Cheim & Read, 521 W. 23rd St. 242-7727. Through April 25. . . . **tokihiro sato,** Tonkonow, 601 W. 26th St. 255-8450. Through April 25. . . . **aaron siskind,** Carr, 478 West Broadway. 673-5518. Closed Tuesdays; through April 11. . . . **david smith,** Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 243-0200. Through April 18. . . . **paul strand,** Burden, 20 E. 23rd St. 505-5555. Through April 4. . . . **ed van der elsken,** Gallery 292, at 120 Wooster St. 431-0292. Through April 25. . . . **catherine wagner,** Shainman, 513 W. 20th St. 645-1701. Through April 11. . . . **william wegman,** Pace Wildenstein MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 759-7999. Through April 25. *(See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum and the Museum of Modern Art.)*

CLASSICAL MUSIC

(The box-office number for Carnegie Hall and Weill Recital Hall is 247-7800; for Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St., 501-3330; and for the 92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St., 996-1100.)

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera—**lohengrin,** with Deborah Voigt, Deborah Polaski, Ben Heppner, Richard Paul Fink, and Eric Halfvarson; conducted by James Levine. (March 25 at 7.) . . . With Hans-Joachim Ketelsen instead of Mr. Fink. (March 28 at 7:30.) . . . **l'elisir d'amore,** with Ruth Ann Swenson, Frank Lopardo, Earle Patriarco, and Paul Plishka; Maurizio Benini. (March 26 at 8.) . . . **stiffelio,** by Verdi, with Sharon Sweet, Plácido Domingo, Haijing Fu, and Mr. Plishka; Mr. Levine. (March 27 at 8.) . . . **roméo et juliette,** with Angela Gheorghiu, Kristine Jepson, Roberto Alagna, Russell Braun, and Robert Lloyd; Bertrand de Billy. (March 28 at 1:30.) . . . **madama butterfly,** with Galina Gorchakova, Robynne Redmon, Michael Sylvester, and Lucio Gallo; Carlo Rizzi. (March 30 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)



Mezzo-soprano Denyce Graves, performing a recital at the 92nd Street Y.

JULIA GRAN

New York City Opera—**les contes d'hoffmann.** (March 25 at 7:30 and March 28 at 1:30.) . . . **le nozze di figaro.** (March 26 at 7:30.) . . . **madama butterfly.** (March 27 at 8.) . . . **la bohème.** (March 28 at 8 and March 29 at 1:30.) . . . **emmeline,** by Tobias Picker, with Patricia Racette in the title role. (March 31 at 7:30.) (New York State Theatre. 870-5570.)

Philharmonia Baroque—Nicholas McGegan leads the West Coast period-instrument orchestra and the Philharmonia Chorale in two of Handel's powerful dramatic works, at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. March 25 at 7:30: The oratorio "Saul," with a cast that includes soloists Dominique Labelle and Jennifer Smith (sopranos), David Daniels (countertenor), and David Thomas (bass). . . . ¶ March 27 at 7:30: The opera-oratorio "Hercules," here in a concert version, with mezzo-soprano Catherine Robbin, tenor Robert Breault, and baritone Kevin McMillan among the soloists. (30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100.)

Les Arts Florissants—William Christie leads his French early-music specialists in concert performances of Rameau's 1756 opera, "Zoroastre." (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. March 28 at 7:30 and March 29 at 3.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic—David Zinman conducts the première of Robert Beaser's "Manhattan Roll" (a seven-minute work inspired in part by the name of a new menu item at the flagship Empire Szechuan restaurant), in addition to Chopin's E-Minor Piano Concerto (with Mitsuko Uchida) and Carl Goldmark's "Country Wedding" (a charming piece that used to be performed, every now and then, under the name "Rustic Wedding Symphony"). (Avery Fisher Hall. March 25-28 at 8. 875-5030.)

Voices of Ascension Chorus and Orchestra—Dennis Keene directs Bach's "St. Matthew Passion." (Church of the Ascension, Fifth Ave. at 10th St. 254-8553. March 25 at 7.)

New York Chamber Symphony—The orchestra backs up three soloists currently benefitting from the support and career guidance of Young Concert Artists: pianist Freddy Kempff (performing Shostakovich's Piano Concerto No. 1), clarinettist Romain Guyot (in Mozart's Clarinet Concerto), and violinist Yayoi Toda (playing Bruch's Violin Concerto No. 1). Jesse Levine (a Y.C.A. alumnus) conducts. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. March 25 at 8.)

"The Indestructible Bach"—It's a somewhat unsettling name for a concert series; one hopes they don't try too hard to prove the point. This installment features soprano Barbara Hendricks in the composer's Cantatas No. 202 and No. 209, as well as in Villa-Lobos's "Bachianas Brasileiras No. 5." Pärt's "Fratres" (played by eight cellos) and movements from a Bach unaccompanied cello suite complete the program. (92nd Street Y. March 25 at 8.)

Orchestra of St. Luke's—Hugh Wolff leads Aaron Jay Kernis's orchestrations of five Études by Debussy, along with Ellen Taaffe Zwilich's Violin Concerto (a première, with Pamela Frank) and Beethoven's Symphony No. 6. (Carnegie Hall. March 26 at 8.)

Absolute Ensemble—Kristjan Järvi leads Pärt's "Arbos," Aaron Jay Kernis's "100 Greatest Dance Hits" and "Mozart en Route," and Stravinsky's "L'Histoire du Soldat" (in a staged version). (Merkin Concert Hall. March 26 at 8.)

Eos Orchestra—John Harle is featured in saxophone concertos by Richard Rodney Bennett and Jonathan Sheffer (the ensemble's director). Stravinsky's "Ebony Concerto" (with clarinettist Stephen Williamson) and Milhaud's "La Création du Monde" round out the program. (Ethical Culture Society, 2 W. 64th St. March 28 at 8. For information about tickets, call 691-6415.)

"St. John Passion"—Bach's setting of the passion as related in the fourth Gospel has always taken a back seat to his "St. Matthew Passion," which is certainly more breathtaking in its scope and complexity. But the "St. John" does not lack greatness in its own right, and some listeners may prefer its more intimate tone. This week it receives two promising interpretations. March 29 at 3: Owen Burdick directs Trinity Choir and Ensemble Rebel (a European period-instrument group; see also Recitals), with tenor Brad Diamond as the Evangelist and bass Clayton Brainerd as Jesus. (Trinity Church, Broadway at Wall St. 602-0873.) . . . ¶ March 31 at 7:30: Gerre Hancock directs the St. Thomas Choir of Men and Boys and the Concert Royal period-instrument players, with tenor Mark Bleeke and bass Glendower Jones. (St. Thomas Church, Fifth Ave. at 53rd St. 757-7013, ext. 329.)

Philadelphia Orchestra—Mark Wigglesworth conducts Britten's "Sinfonia da Requiem," Mozart's A-Major Piano Concerto (K. 488, with Stephen Hough), and Sibelius's Symphony No. 2. (Carnegie Hall. March 31 at 8.)

RECITALS

William Trafka—The music director and organist of St. Bartholomew's Church offers a recital on his "house organ" which is entirely given over to music by composers whose names begin with B: Buxtehude, Brahms, Bach, Bolcom (his "Black Host," with tape and percussion), and Barber. (Park Ave. at 50th St. 378-0248. March 25 at 7:30.)

Festival Chamber Music Society—The group presents Mozart's C-Major Flute Quartet, Chopin's "Polonaise Brilliante" (Op. 3, for cello and piano), Soong Fu Yuan's "Poems for String Quartet," and Schubert's "Death and the Maiden" Quartet. (Merkin Concert Hall. March 25 at 8.)

Bargemusic—Beethoven's Violin Sonata in A Major (Op. 27), Debussy's Cello Sonata, and Mendelssohn's D-Minor Piano Trio, performed by pianist Anne-Marie McDermott, violinist Kerry McDermott (her sister), and cellist Peter Wylie. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061. March 26 at 7:30 and March 29 at 4.)

Paula Robison and Friends—The flutist and several colleagues present an all-Handel program. (Temple of Dendur, Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. March 27-28 at 7.)

Alicia de Larrocha—In her only New York recital this season, the Spanish pianist performs works by two of her compatriots—Turina (his "Tres Danzas Fantásticas") and Albéniz—in addition to several works by Chopin. (Carnegie Hall. March 27 at 7:30.)

Lindsay String Quartet—This distinguished British ensemble offers four quartets by Haydn: in F Minor (Op. 20, No. 5), E-Flat Major (Op. 33, No. 2), C Major (Op. 54, No. 2), and G Major (Op. 76, No. 1). (Weill Recital Hall. March 27 at 8.)

Ensemble Rebel—The Baroque quartet, which was formed in Utrecht in 1989, offers chamber works by Couperin, Corelli, Purcell, and others (including, of course, the group's namesake, Jean-Féry Rebel). (St. Luke In-the-Fields, 487 Hudson St., at Grove St. 633-2167. March 27 at 8.)

Miami String Quartet—The ensemble plays quartets by Haydn (in E-Flat Major, Op. 33, No. 2) and Beethoven (in B-Flat Major, Op. 130). (Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center. March 29 at 11 A.M. For information about tickets, call 875-5050.)

Ursula Oppens—Performing Beethoven's Piano Sonatas in A Major (Op. 2, No. 2), F Major (Op. 10, No. 2), and F Minor (Op. 57), as well as Babbitt's "Three Compositions for Piano" and Bolcom's "Graceful Ghost Rag" and "Dead Moth Tango." (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. March 29 at 3. . . . NOTE: This recital has been rescheduled from Feb. 26.)

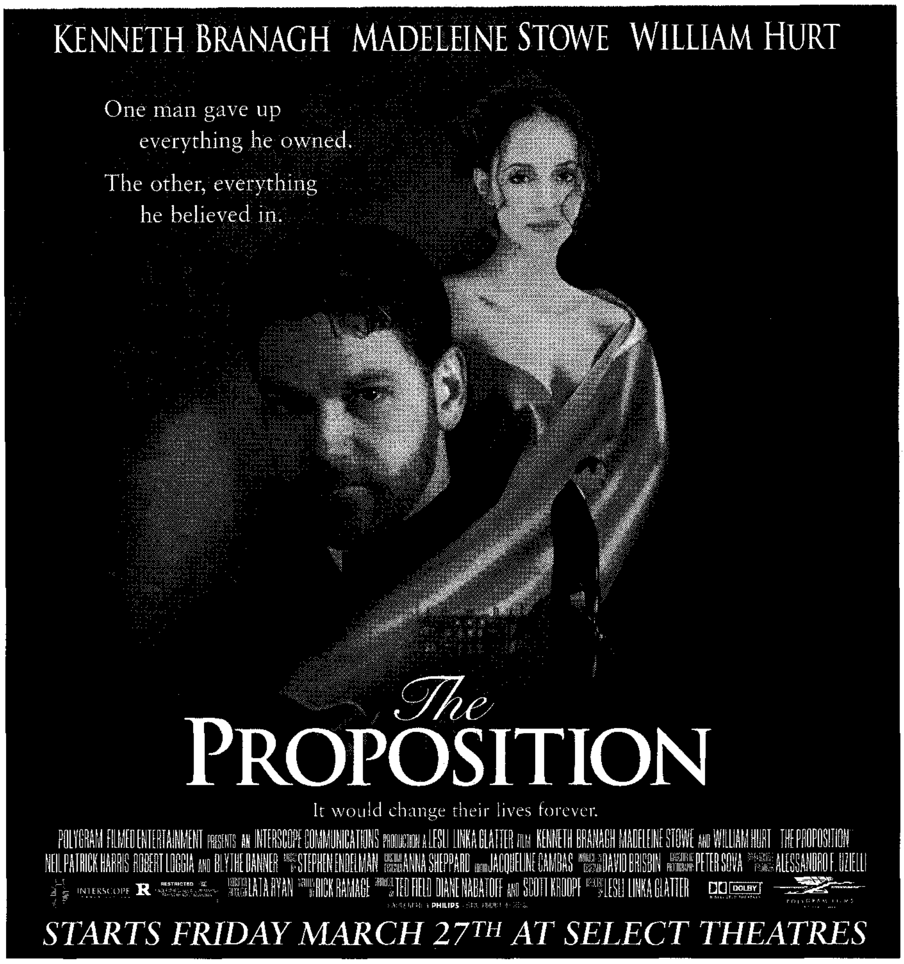
New York Philharmonic Ensembles—Members of the orchestra, plus a few guests, play Shostakovich's Piano Quintet, Rachmaninoff's "Trio Élégiaque" No. 1, and Bartók's "Contrasts." (Merkin Concert Hall. March 29 at 3.)

Daniel Gortler—Pianist, performing all forty-eight of Mendelssohn's "Songs Without Words." (92nd Street Y. March 29 at 3.)

Dan Laurin and Jakob Lindberg—The recorder player and the lutenist—both Swedish, and stars of the international early-music scene—team up for a recital of Baroque works by Telemann, Bach, and others. Presented by Music Before 1800. (Corpus Christi Church, 529 W. 121st St. 666-9266. March 29 at 4.)

Musica ad Rhenum—In its New York recital début, the early-instrument quintet plays works by Vivaldi, Bach, Locatelli, Albinoni, and Quantz. (Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St. 288-0700. March 29 at 5.)

Arcadian Academy—Countertenor David Daniels joins the early-music group to perform cantatas by Alessandro Scarlatti; also on the program are instrumental pieces from seventeenth-century Italy and England. Nicholas McGegan directs. (Church of the Holy Family, 315 E. 47th St. March 29 at 8. For information about tickets, call 551-3000. A benefit concert.)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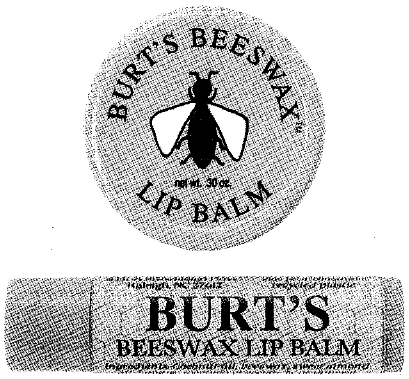

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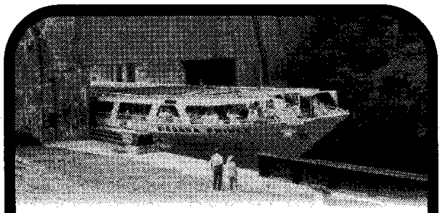

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LOUIS QUILICO—Baritone, performing songs by Duparc, Fauré, Mussorgsky, and others, with pianist Christina Petrowska. (Merkin Concert Hall. March 30 at 8.)

ANGELES STRING QUARTET—The California ensemble performs an all-Haydn recital that includes the composer's final, incomplete string quartet (in D Minor, Op. 103); the Morgan Library happens to own the manuscript of that work, and will have it on display for concert-goers to admire. (Morgan Library, 29 E. 36th St. 685-0008, ext. 347. March 31 at 6:15.)

DENYCE GRAVES—The mezzo-soprano, assisted by pianist Warren Jones, performs songs by Puccini, Bizet, Schubert, and others. (92nd Street Y. March 31 at 8.)

MAGELLAN STRING QUARTET—The foursome, now in its second year as a resident graduate-student ensemble at the Juilliard School, performs quartets by Haydn (in F Minor, Op. 20, No. 5) and Beethoven (in B-Flat Major, Op. 18, No. 6), plus a true curiosity: the String Quartet No. 1 by Artur Schnabel. Though famous as a pianist capable of profound interpretations of Germanic classics (especially the music of Beethoven, Schubert, and Brahms), Schnabel was also active as a composer of atonal works in a sometimes spiky, dissonant idiom. These range from large-scale pieces (such as three symphonies and a piano concerto) to chamber works, including five string quartets (two of which the Magellan is currently recording). (Alice Tully Hall. March 31 at 8. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 769-7406.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

METAMORPHOSIS—Translators of Kafka's unfinished novel "The Castle" have always relied on text prepared by the author's friend Max Brod, who, though he saved the manuscript from destruction, altered it considerably. Now a new English-language version of the novel is available, based on a 1982 German critical edition compiled from Kafka's notes, not Brod's revisions. Translated by University of Pennsylvania professor Mark Harman, it emphasizes Kafka's modernity and features his unconventional punctuation and original paragraphing. On March 26 at 8, *New Yorker* writer David Remnick hosts an evening celebrating the author which includes talks by novelists Aharon Appelfeld (on Kafka's Jewishness) and David Foster Wallace (on his humor), and readings by the actor Christopher Plummer (from an essay by Nabokov on "The Metamorphosis") and Harman (from "The Castle.") (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824.)

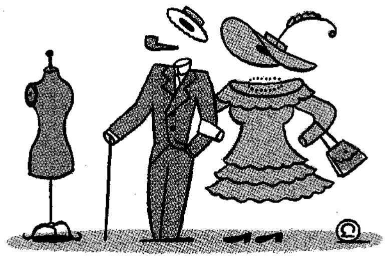
MORE READINGS—March 25 at 8: By Robert Sullivan, from "The Meadowlands," his book about the corner of New Jersey that's home to Devils, Giants, and egrets. (Rocky Sullivan's Pub, 129 Lexington Ave., at 29th St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ March 29 at 3: By poet Marie Ponsot. (Posman Books, 1 University Pl. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ March 31 at 7: By Oliver Sacks, from his latest work, "The Island of the Colorblind." (MacIntosh Student Center, Barnard College, Broadway at 116th St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ March 31 at 7:30: By Hugh Gallagher ("Teeth") and Dan Barden ("John Wayne"), from their novels. (Limbo, 47 Avenue A, at 4th St. No tickets necessary.)

MORE TALKS—March 26 at 6: Historians Amy Gilman Srebnick and Barbara Cutter join archeologist Rebecca Yamin in a discussion of female criminal activities in antebellum New York City. (South Street Seaport Museum, 171 John St. 748-8600.) . . . ¶ March 26 at 8:15: After leading a tour of the Chuck Close retrospective, Museum of Modern Art curator Robert Storr talks with the artist about his work. (Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. For more information, call 996-1100.)

BOOK CURRENTS

Historical Threads

In her 1954 autobiography, **SHOCKING LIFE**, the Surrealist designer Elsa Schiaparelli pinpointed both the delight and the heartbreak of designing clothes: "A dress has no life of its own unless it is worn, and as soon as this happens another personality takes over from you and animates it, or tries to, glorifies or destroys it, or makes it into a song of beauty."



Sometimes the beauty of fashion is purely visual, but at other times it carries a deeper cultural significance. Richard Martin, the curator of the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, who wrote the text for the recently published **GIANNI VERSACE** (Abrams), understands the need to think about the cultural meaning of clothing without losing sight of its aesthetic and tactile pleasures. For Martin, one book that blends those two aims nicely is Daniel Roche's **THE CULTURE OF CLOTHING: DRESS AND FASHION IN THE ANCIEN RÉGIME** (Cambridge University Press), which covers various aspects of eighteenth-century wardrobe, etiquette, and hygiene. He also admires **ARE CLOTHES MODERN?**, Bernard Rudofsky's 1947 study. Although it provides some intellectual guideposts, Martin says, it's not steeped in theory. "Rudofsky was asking basic questions about clothing," he says, "and encouraging people to think that perhaps buttons were old-fashioned, and there might be new ways of fastening—snaps and things like that."

But Martin's favorite fashion book is James Laver's 1946 **A LETTER TO A GIRL ON THE FUTURE OF CLOTHES**, a rumination written to a ten-year-old. "He's really trying to think about what the world will be like ten years later," Martin says. "He finally says that clothing will have certain minor changes, but the real question is whether the world will become totalitarian and uniform, or. . . democratic." Democracy, Laver thought, would open up the possibilities for self-expression in clothing, and that, Martin feels, is emblematic of what makes us free. Laver's book "strikes me as kind of a tonic," he says, "something to read again at this point of premillennial expectations."

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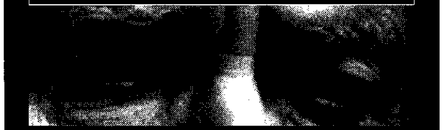

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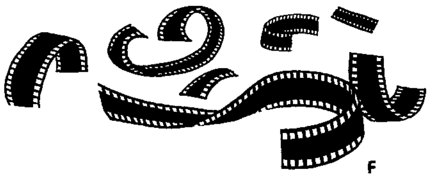

OPENINGS

CHARACTER—A drama, based on the 1938 Dutch novel by Ferdinand Bordewijk, about an illegitimate son, his vengeful father, and murder. Directed by Mike van Diem. In Dutch. Opening March 27. (Quad Cinema.)

EDEN—Joanna Going stars in this mid-sixties story of a woman with multiple sclerosis who is also a wife, mother, and mentor to a dormful of teen-agers. Also with Dylan Walsh and Sean Patrick Flanery. Written and directed by Harold Goldberg. Opening March 27. (Sutton and Village East Cinemas.)

FROZEN—A young performance artist stages his own suicide as a protest against the Chinese government, in this film directed by Wu Ming. In Mandarin. Opening March 25. (Cinema Village.)

GENEALOGIES OF A CRIME—A psychological thriller starring Catherine Deneuve in dual roles—a Vienna psychoanalyst killed by her nephew and the lawyer who defends the killer. With Melvil Poupaud and Michel Piccoli. Directed by Raoul Ruiz. In French. Opening March 27. (Quad Cinema.)

JAMES ELLROY: DEMON DOG OF AMERICAN CRIME FICTION—Reinhard Jud's 1993 documentary about the Los Angeles writer. Opening March 25. (Film Forum.)

MEET THE DEEDLES—A comedy about two surfing brothers who unexpectedly find themselves in Yellowstone National Park, training to be park rangers. Directed by Steve Boyum. Opening March 27. (Embassy 3.)

THE NEWTON BOYS—An action-adventure film, starring Matthew McConaughey, Ethan Hawke, Vincent D'Onofrio, and Skeet Ulrich, based on the exploits of the Newton brothers, a sibling gang that robbed banks in the West between 1919 and 1924. Directed by Richard Linklater. Opening March 27.

NO LOOKING BACK—A romantic drama of small-town life and loves written and directed by, and starring, Edward Burns. Also with Lauren Holly, Jon Bon Jovi, Blythe Danner, and Connie Britton. Opening March 27.

A PRICE ABOVE RUBIES—Reviewed below in Film Notes.

THE PROPOSITION—A story of love and murder involving a writer (Madeleine Stowe) and the three men in her life (William Hurt, Kenneth Branagh, and Neil Patrick Harris). Directed by Lesli Linka Glatter. Opening March 27.

RIDE—The comic adventures of a group of kids from Harlem on a bus ride to Miami. Written and directed by Millicent Shelton. Opening March 27. (Embassy 1 and Embassy 2.)

FILM NOTES

(If a movie has been reviewed recently in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given.)

THE APOSTLE—Produced, written, and directed by its star, Robert Duvall, this film addresses without condescension or glibness a subject—religious conviction—that Hollywood generally caricatures. Duvall plays Sonny, a charismatic Pentecostal preacher on the run from the police. Duvall's performance is so passionate that it's almost eerie: Is Sonny acting him or is he acting Sonny? The supporting players include Farrah Fawcett, John Beasley, June Carter Cash, Miranda Richardson, and Billy Bob Thornton.—*Daphne Merkin* (2/2/98) (Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Waverly.)

AS GOOD AS IT GETS—A romantic comedy directed and co-written (with Mark Andrus) by James L. Brooks, in which an improbable trio overcomes a heap of troubles and finds collective happiness, sitcom style. Jack Nicholson stars as a romance novelist with a seriously alienating manner, Helen Hunt is a waitress with a young son who has a life-threatening disease, and Greg Kinnear is a gay painter with a sweet smile and no visible erotic attachments. You keep expecting to hear a laugh track.—*D.M.* (1/5/98) (Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, and Village East Cinemas.)

THE BIG LEBOWSKI—After the mysteriously affecting "Fargo," the Coen brothers have reverted to their studied pose of cynical disengagement with a movie that—insofar as it's about anything—is about the interface of bowling and Orthodox Judaism. Set in Los Angeles, this irritatingly antic caper stars Jeff Bridges as the Dude, a carefree seventies-style dropout who hangs out at the local bowling alley with his buddies Walter (John Goodman), a chronically irate Nam vet, and Donny (Steve Buscemi), the trio's sweet but dim verbal foil. Although his laid-back existence is interrupted by at least three extortion and kidnapping plots, all of which revolve around an elderly millionaire in a wheelchair (David Huddleston), the Dude—who's not only amiable but infinitely resilient—comes out smiling, like Popeye. The clever dialogue, seductive camera work, and beautiful production design (the lavish dream sequences look like Busby Berkeley on Ecstasy) almost make you forget the vacancy at the movie's core, but in the end there's no escaping the feeling that the Coens are speaking a secret language. With Julianne Moore and John Turturro.—*D.M.* (3/23/98) (Beekman, Chelsea West, 84th Street Sixplex, Orpheum VII, State, and Village Theatre VII.)

FALLEN CHAMP: THE UNTOLD STORY OF MIKE TYSON (1993)—Barbara Kopple's documentary portrait of this troubled and troubling fighter is a knockout. She traces Tyson's progress from petty thief to pulverizing heavyweight with empathy and intelligence; the result is a rags-to-riches tragedy. Tyson emerges as a dangerous lost soul, veering from one questionable influence to another en route to celebrity hell. Kopple asks us to understand this man in all his volatile complexity, right up to her rendering of his trial and conviction for rape. When the victim's father, a boxing fan who once idolized Tyson, says, "He was great—in the ring," the statement carries the weight of an epitaph.—*Michael Sragow* (American Museum of the Moving Image; March 29.)

FIREWORKS—The multitalented Takeshi Kitano stars in an action film he also wrote and directed, about an ex-cop with a violent streak who robs a bank and is trailed to a quiet mountain village by the yakuza. Mr. Kitano also did original paintings and drawings for the film. In Japanese. (Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema.) (Film Forum.)

THE FULL MONTY—An amiable light comedy, directed by Peter Cattaneo, about six unemployed British steelworkers who mount an all-male strip show for cash. The script, by Simon Beaufoy, is clean and well developed. Each character is given his bit to do, and when the motley crew comes together the actors all work wonderfully with one another, finding a sexy, warm performance rhythm as they gyrate to some classic seventies disco. Two of the actors—Mark Addy, who plays an overweight, insecure worker, and Robert Carlyle, as the ringleader—are sensational.—*Bruce Diones* (Art Greenwich Twin, Metro Cinema, The Screening Room, and Sutton.)

GOOD WILL HUNTING—Matt Damon plays a belligerent working-class genius from South Boston who's been abused in foster homes and is now being given a chance to triumph over his past; Robin Williams is the maverick shrink who helps him understand his demons; and Minnie Driver is the unsnobbish Harvard girlfriend who tries to heal him with acceptance. If it sounds treacly, it's not, thanks to a honed script (co-written by Damon and Ben Affleck, who plays Damon's best pal), subtle performances, and surpris-

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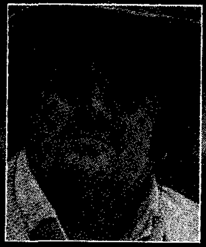
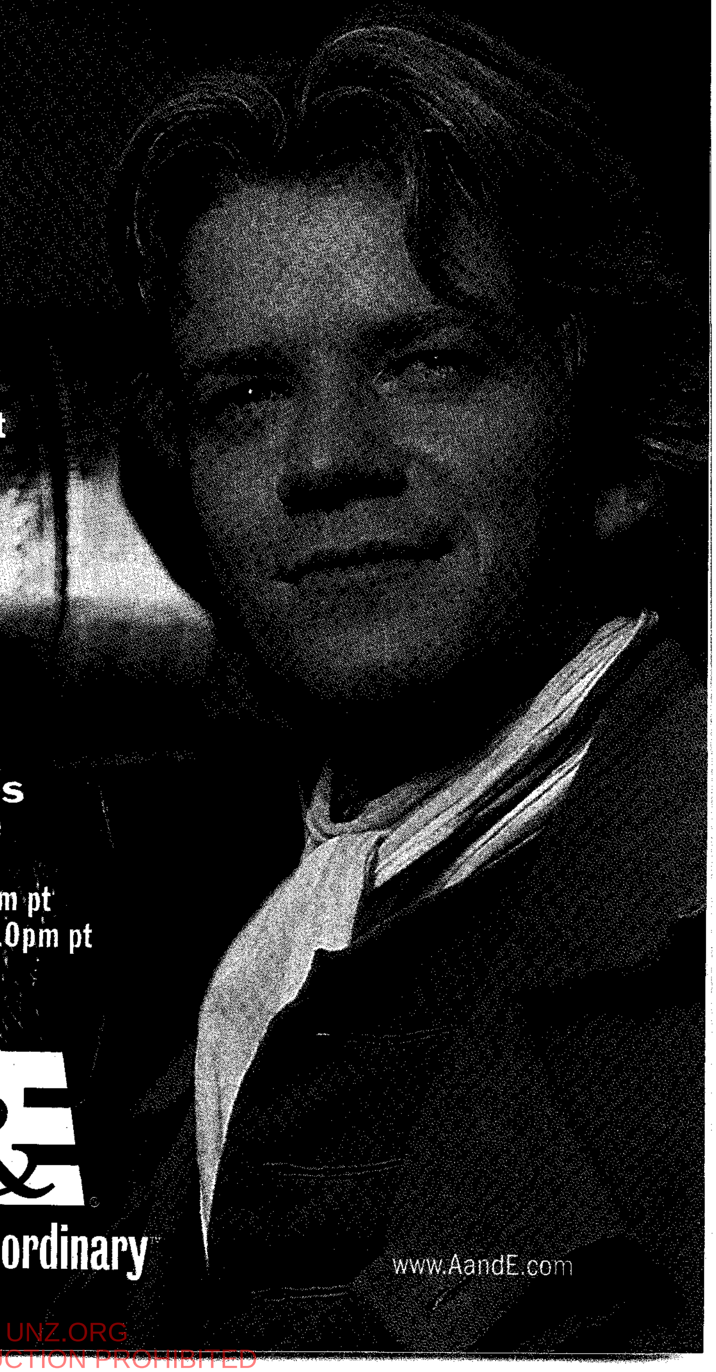


Jane Eyre
Tuesday, 3/31
9pm et/10pm pt

Emma
Saturday, 4/4
10pm et/7pm pt



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4/6-7 9pm et/10pm pt

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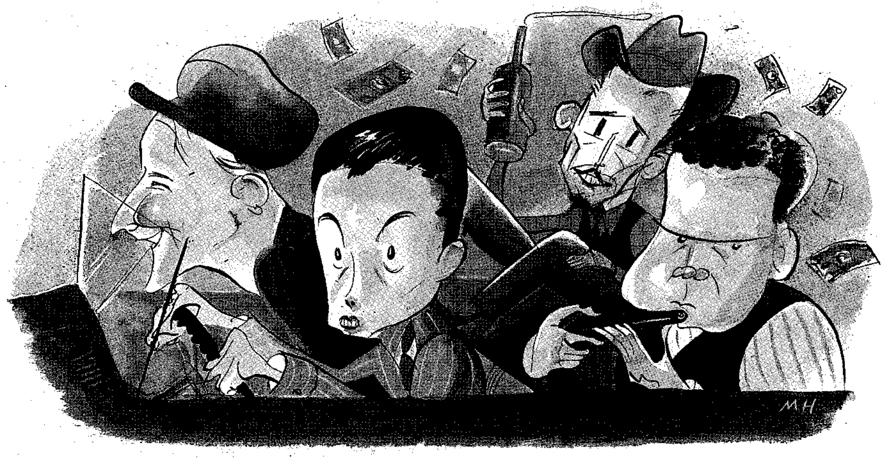
ingly warm direction by Gus Van Sant.—*D.M.* (1/19/98) (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea West, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, New York Twin, and State.)

L.A. Confidential—Curtis Hanson's thriller, set in Los Angeles in the early fifties, is about a group of cops who between them cover the full moral range, from the uptight integrity of Ed Exley (Guy Pearce) to the four-star sadism of Bud White (Russell Crowe). The plot, adapted from the James Ellroy novel, is both murky and tangled, yet the movie never bogs down. Hanson paces the tale with ease, decorating it with one neat performance after another: James Cromwell as the smiling police chief, David Strathairn as an oily pimp, Kim Basinger as one of his prize charges, and, best of all, Kevin Spacey as a "celebrity crime-stopper" who gets dragged into the dark and dirty.—*Anthony Lane* (9/22/97) (Art Greenwich Twin, 84th Street Sixplex, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, and 34th Street Showplace.)

Love and Death on Long Island—A surprising film about romantic pursuit, written like a mischievous postmodern fable. John Hurt is Giles De'Ath, a widowed British author of highbrow novels who lives in reclusive Luddite splendor until he is smitten with teen-flick heartthrob Ronnie Bostock (Jason Priestley). Giles pursues this unlikely object of desire all the way to a sweet little Long Island hamlet, where his inventive plans for ensnaring Ronnie prove to be both baroquely funny and touching. One of the many ways in which the film subverts our expectations is by refusing to condescend to its central character; we come to see the daffy Giles as half stalker, half *poète maudit*, transfigured by romantic greatness. Directed with an original touch by Richard Kwietniowski, the movie is less about the nature of homoerotic longing than about the closeted nature of love itself.—*D.M.* (3/9/98) (Angelika Film Center, Cinema II, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)



Opening March 27, Matthew McConaughey, Skeet Ulrich, Ethan Hawke, and Vincent D'Onofrio in Richard Linklater's "The Newton Boys."

Men with Guns—John Sayles's first film since "Lone Star" is no match for that relaxed and haunting tale. Federico Luppi (as strong here as he was in "Cronos") plays Fuentes, a government doctor, all white hair and good suits, who leaves his dignified life to track down his students who were sent, armed with medicines and high ideals, into remote areas of an unnamed Latin American country. The journey involves the getting of wisdom and the loss of faith, as Fuentes discovers the horrors that befell his protégés. The movie is calm and considered, but also schematic; you can't help feeling that you're being taught a lesson—a true and valuable one, perhaps, but it's still enough to block the flow of the drama. The story jerks along in episodes, although, to be fair, some of these are beautifully told: the most harrowing involves a priest (Damián Alcázar) whose Christian courage fails him in his, and others', hour of need. In Spanish.—*A.L.* (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Mrs. Dalloway—With Marleen Gorris ("Antonia's Line") as director, Eileen Atkins as screenwriter, and Vanessa Redgrave in the title role, the near-impossible is achieved: Virginia Woolf's lyrical evocation of life-as-flux is safely transferred to the screen, helped by an evocative soundtrack, well-edited flashbacks, and an adroit substitution of voice-over for the novel's interior monologues. The supporting performances—by John Standing, Margaret Tyzack, Amelia Bullmore, and Rupert Graves, among others—are a triumph of ensemble acting.—*D.M.* (2/16/98) (Angelika Film Center, Eastside Playhouse, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Post Coitum—A film about the price of passion which flirts with profundity and ends up seeming merely fashionable. A forty-year-old book editor, contentedly married and the mother of two sons, has an affair with a tall, dark, and handsome engineer who also happens to be twenty years her junior. When this *amour fou* ends, the woman is unable to go on and she begins to self-destruct—until her star writer, another gorgeous young man, steps in and whisks her off to Greece, where she regains her senses. This is the sort of movie that purports to deal with such chic feminist issues as middle-aged sexual longing and the stigma of aging but that seems more at ease with chic aesthetic details—a scarf that's folded just right, tasteful sheets on a bed—than with the ungainly reality of its own unfolding drama. Co-written and directed by, and starring, Brigitte Roüan, who should have studied Truffaut's mesmerizingly melancholic "The Story of Adèle H." more carefully before taking on the psychology of love addiction. In French.—*D.M.* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

A Price Above Rubies—Renée Zellweger looks alternately bewildered and pouty in her role as the wife of an ultra-Orthodox scholar (Glenn Fitzgerald) who invokes the Rebbe at every opportunity and treats marital sex as an indecent diversion from his spiritual duties. The claustrophobic feel of the couple's Borough Park community is effectively rendered, and its details—from the obligatory plastic covering on the dining-room chairs to the women's wigs and long-sleeved dresses—are authentic as can be, but the movie's emotional tone wobbles confusingly between magic realism and poorly nuanced character study. Still, there's the kernel of something interesting in this I. B. Singer-like tale of a young woman born into the wrong culture who eventually finds a way to make a new life for herself—replete with a Hispanic lover and unkosher egg rolls. With "ER"'s Julianna Margulies, who is utterly convincing as a proper Hasidic wife and mother. Written and directed by Boaz Yakin.—*D.M.* (Angelika Film Center and Paris; starting March 25.)

The Southerner (1945)—Jean Renoir's poetic account of the year of a poor white Texas family—a chronicle of seasons and conflicts, adapted from the book "Hold Autumn in Your Hand," by George Sessions Perry. Zachary Scott, who usually played lounge lizards, is almost unrecognizable as a young tenant farmer; it was the performance of his career. Betty Field plays his wife, and his relatives and neighbors include Percy Kilbride, J. Carrol Naish, and, regrettably, Beulah Bondi, who is more than a bit much as Granny. The picture has beautiful, evocative moments, mysteriously solemn. Though William Faulkner worked on the screenplay, Renoir is the only one listed, with Hugo Butler credited for the preliminary adaptation. Werner Janssen did the music.—*Pauline Kael* (Anthology Film Archives; March 28-29.)

Strawberry and Chocolate (1995)—The Cuban director Tomás Gutiérrez Alea charts the efforts of Diego (Jorge Perugorria), a gay artist, to seduce David (Vladimir Cruz), a straight and, frankly, rather boring student. It's a daring movie to have come out of Cuba, although Gutiérrez Alea's grasp of the radical temperament may seem unsophisticated to audiences here. Diego kicks out against government restrictions, David lives quietly within them; wouldn't it have been more intriguing the other way around? Co-directed by Juan Carlos Tabio. In Spanish.—*A.L.* (Symphony Space; March 31.)

Taste of Cherry—Abbas Kiarostami's new film follows a prosperous man, Mr. Badii (Homayoun Ershadi, heading up a cast of nonprofessional actors), as he drives through the parched hills around Teheran begging strangers to help bury him once he commits suicide. The result is a fascinating neorealist excursion. Mr. Badii meets a shy Kurdish soldier, an Afghani seminarian, and a gregarious museum taxidermist; Kiarostami unfolds each new character with a humanistic patience that's rare in movies these days. The director also draws on his art-school training to show us a Teheran that is a horrifying sprawl of concrete and exquisitely beautiful at the same time. The film isn't quite the masterpiece some critics are hailing it as: its sometimes ponderous existentialism seems too closely modelled on European masterpieces of a generation ago, and its ending is too clever by half. But it is a collection of small, scattered miracles. In Farsi.—*Sarah Kerr* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

Titanic—At well over three hours, James Cameron's grand new picture has plenty of romance to get through before it breaks the vessel in half. Leonardo DiCaprio plays the freewheeling Jack, who wins a steerage ticket and finds himself falling for the wealthy Rose (Kate Winslet), to the disapproval of her mother (Frances Fisher) and her brute of a fiancé (Billy Zane). The social animus of the story, like its imaginative majesty, is Dickensian; this all feels like two hundred million dollars well spent.—*A.L.* (12/15/97) (Astor Plaza, Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Olympia, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Showplace, and Village Theatre VII.)

Twilight—Paul Newman plays a retired, limping private eye named Harry Ross, who lives in Los Angeles with his ailing friend Jack (Gene Hackman) and Jack's wife, Catherine (Susan Sarandon). Harry is sent to deliver a package across town, and, true to the traditions of the genre, he finds himself in trouble. The past rears its head, the dames play him like a fish, and even his pal Raymond (James Garner) is only half helpful. Robert Benton's movie is shot with shadowy grace by Piotr Sobocinski; the lack of pace, however, feels fatally close to inertia, and the solution of the mystery comes as absolutely no surprise. Like Benton's "Nobody's Fool," this one was co-written by Benton and Richard Russo, but it seems less sure of its motives. You could

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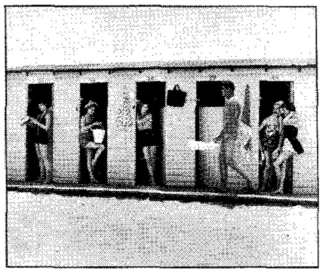

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say the same of Harry Ross. With Reese Witherspoon and Stockard Channing, who are outplayed by all the old guys.—*A.L.* (3/16/98) (Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, 72nd Street East, State, 34th Street Showplace, and Village Theatre VII.)

The Wedding Singer—A romantic comedy in which everything twinkles, from the credits to Adam Sandler's eyes. Sandler is Robbie Hart, once the spandex-clad lead singer of a high-school rock group, now a master of ceremonies at color-coördinated weddings in Connecticut. Drew Barrymore is a waitress who enlists his help in planning her nuptials with a junk-bond trader who clearly doesn't deserve her; she and Robbie—you guessed it—fall for each other. Long patches of the film are hilarious, and might make you nostalgic for life in the 'burbs, even if you grew up in the city. Directed by Frank Coraci, from a screenplay by Tim Herlihy.—*D.M.* (Cinema I, Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas.)

ALSO PLAYING

AFTERGLOW (reviewed in our issue of 1/19/98): Regency. . . .**ANASTASIA:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . .**BOOGIE NIGHTS** (10/13/97): Worldwide Cinemas. . . .**DANGEROUS BEAUTY:** Angelika Film Center, Lincoln Square, and 64th and 2nd. . . .**DARK CITY:** Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, 59th Street East Cinema, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII. . . .**FALLEN:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . .**FOR RICHER OR POORER:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **GREASE:** Guild. . . .**THE ICE STORM** (9/29/97): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **JOHN GRISHAM'S THE RAINMAKER:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . .**LEADING MAN:** Village East Cinemas. . . .**LIVE FLESH** (1/26/98): Angelika Film Center and 62nd & Broadway. . . . **THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK:** Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, Olympia, Orpheum VII, State, and Village Theatre VII. . . .**MENDEL:** Quad Cinema. . . .**MR. NICE GUY:** Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, Sutton, and Village East Cinemas. . . .**MRS. BROWN** (8/4/97): Village East Cinemas. . . .**NIAGARA, NIAGARA:** Village East Cinemas. . . .**PRIMARY COLORS:** Chelsea Cinemas, Coronet Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Metro Cinema, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Showplace, Waverly, and Ziegfeld. . . .**THE SWEET HEREAFTER** (11/24/97): Cinema 3rd Avenue and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . .**TOMORROW NEVER DIES:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . .**U.S. MARSHALS:** Coronet Cinemas, Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII. . . .**WAG THE DOG** (1/5/98): Art Greenwich Twin, Lincoln Square, Sutton, and Village East Cinemas. . . .**WIDE AWAKE:** Lincoln Square. . . .**WILD THINGS:** Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village East Cinemas. . . .**THE WINGS OF THE DOVE** (11/10/97): 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, and Village East Cinemas.

At the American Museum of the Moving Image, documentaries by Barbara Kopple.

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REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)

New Directors/New Films—The first programs in a seventeen-day festival of international films. March 27 at 6 and March 28 at 4: "Sherman Alexie's Smoke Signals" (Chris Eyre; United States). . . .March 27 at 9 and March 28 at 12:30: "Western" (Manuel Poirier; France). . . .March 28 at 4:30 and March 29 at 6:30: "Goshogaoka" (Sharon Lockhart; Japan and United States). . . . March 28 at 6:30 and March 29 at 3: "Under the Skin" (Carine Adler; United Kingdom). . . .March 28 at 9:30 and March 29 at noon: "The Lucky Star" (Ricardo Franco; Spain). . . .March 29 at 6 and March 30 at 9: "Cosmos" (Andre Turpin, Manon Briand, Marie-Julie Dallaire, Denis Villeneuve, Jennifer Alleyn, and Arto Paragamian; Canada). . . .March 29 at 8:30 and March 30 at 6: "Leila" (Dariush Mehrjui; Iran). . . . March 31 at 6: "See the Sea" (François Ozon; France). . . .March 31 at 8:30: "The First Time" (Connie Walther; Germany). (Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. For information, call 708-9500.)

Film Forum 2, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Through March 26: "Mean Streets" (1973, Martin Scorsese). . . . March 27: "Becky Sharp" (1935, Rouben Mamoulian). . . . March 28: "The Big Sleep" (1945, Howard Hawks). . . . March 29: "Mr. Skeffington" (1944, Vincent Sherman). . . .March 30: "Romola" (1925, Henry King). . . .March 31: "The Sea Hawk" (1924, Frank Lloyd; silent).

Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—March 26 at 2:30: "Anatomy of a Murder" (1959, Otto Preminger). . . .March 26 at 6: One program in a series about the history of 8-mm. films and videos in the United States. . . . March 26 at 6: "Laura" (1944, Preminger).

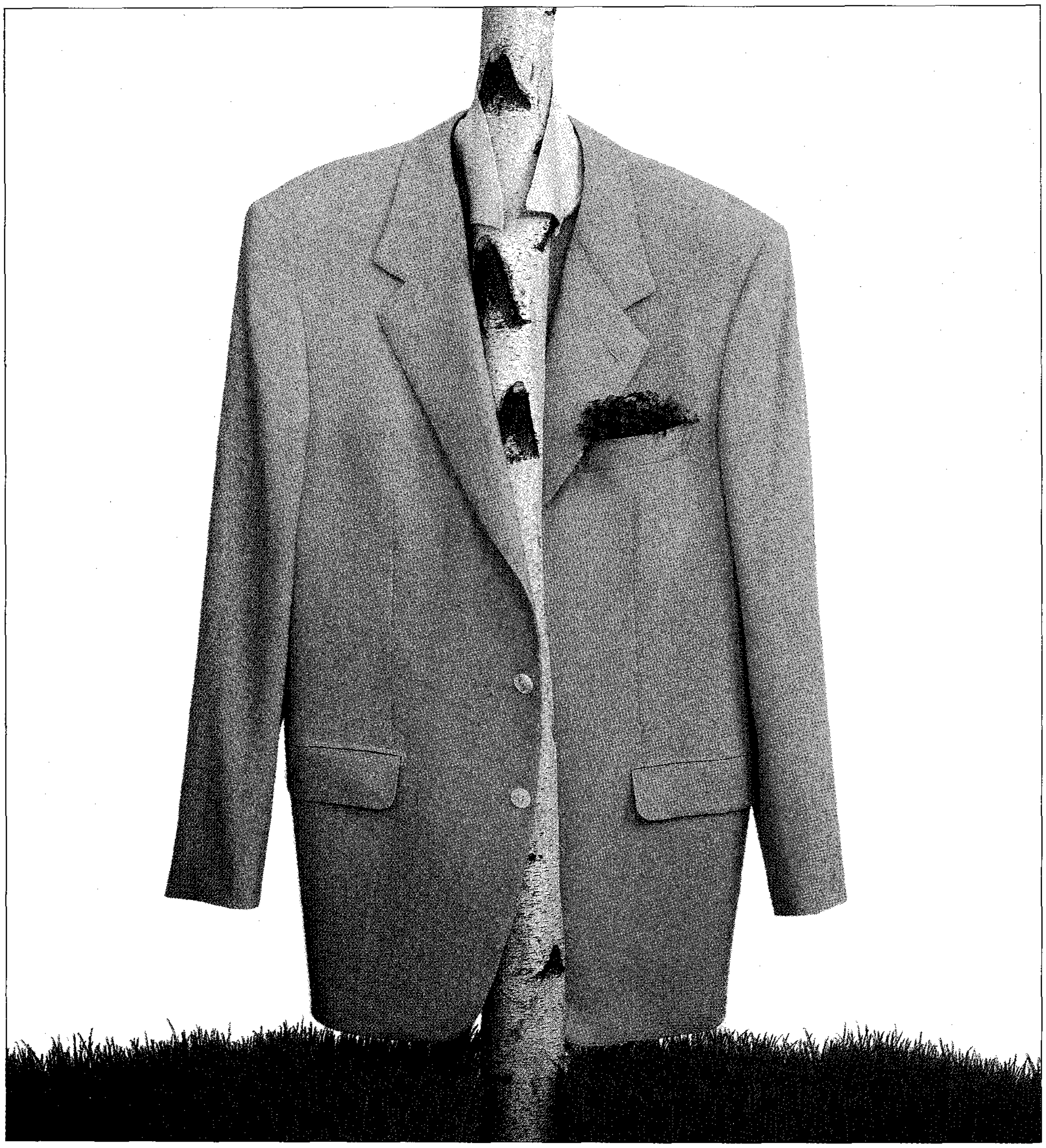
Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600)—March 25 at 2, March 26 at 2 and 6:15, March 28 at 4, and March 29 at 4 and 7:45: "Public Housing" (1997, Frederick Wiseman). . . . March 28-29 at 2: "Danny, the Champion of the World" (1989, Gavin Millar). . . .March 30 at 2, 6, and 7:45: "Theodora Goes Wild" (1936, Richard Boleslawski). . . .March 30 at 4 and 8:30: "The Awful Truth" (1937, Leo McCarey).

American Museum of the Moving Image, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—A program of documentaries directed by Barbara Kopple. March 28 at 2: "Harlan County, U.S.A." (1977). . . .March 28 at 5: "American Dream" (1989). . . .March 29 at 1:30: "Fallen Champ: The Untold Story of Mike Tyson" (†). . . .March 29 at 4:30: "Wild Man Blues" (1997).

Cantor Film Center, 36 E. 8th St.—March 27-April 3 at 5, 7, and 9: Short films and videos by students of New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. (For information, call 998-1795.)

A Different Light Bookstore, 151 W. 19th St.—A Sunday-night series of free films (and popcorn). March 29 at 7, the feature will be "Beyond the Valley of the Dolls" (1970, Russ Meyer).

In Praise Of … Spring



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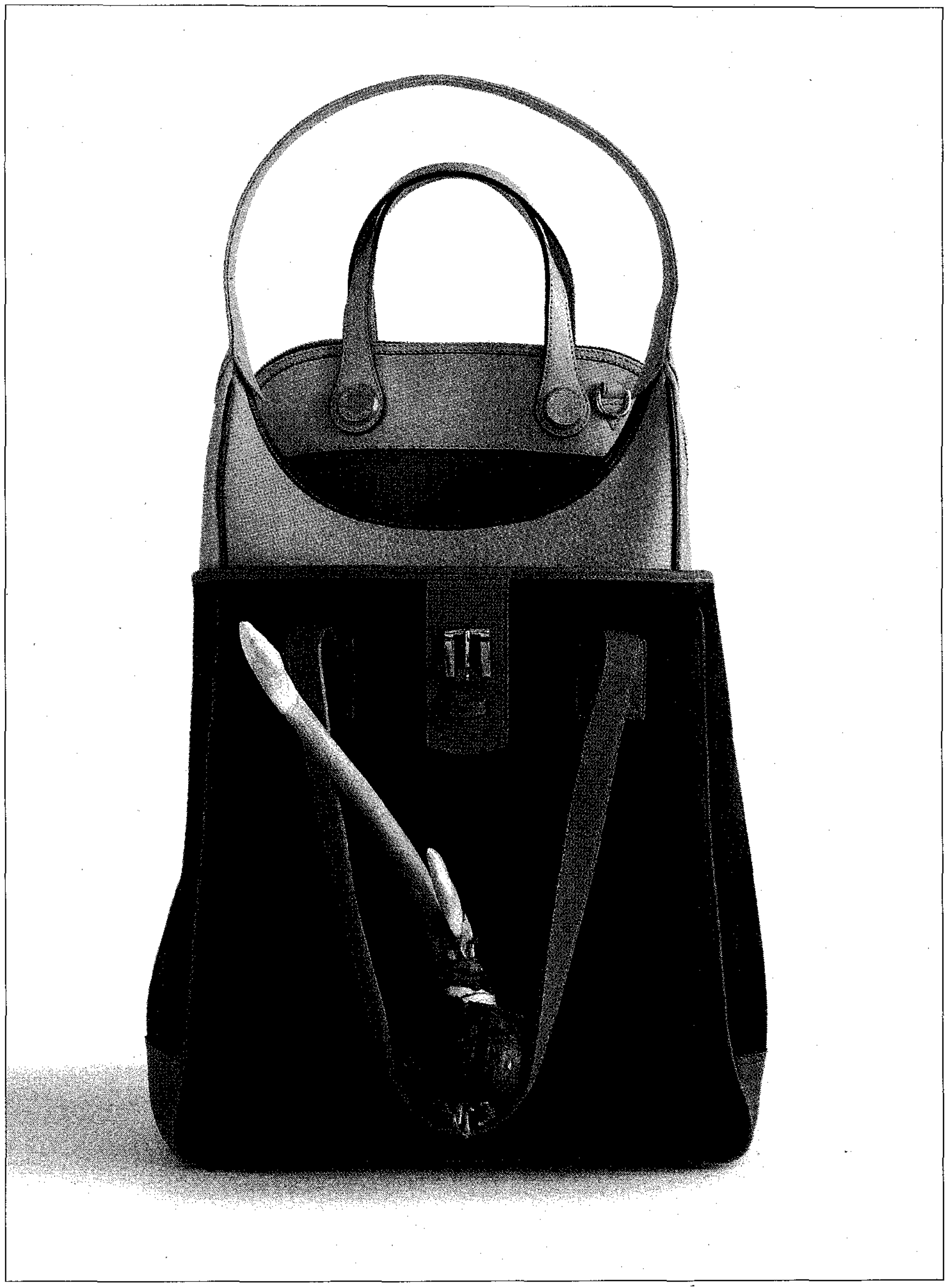

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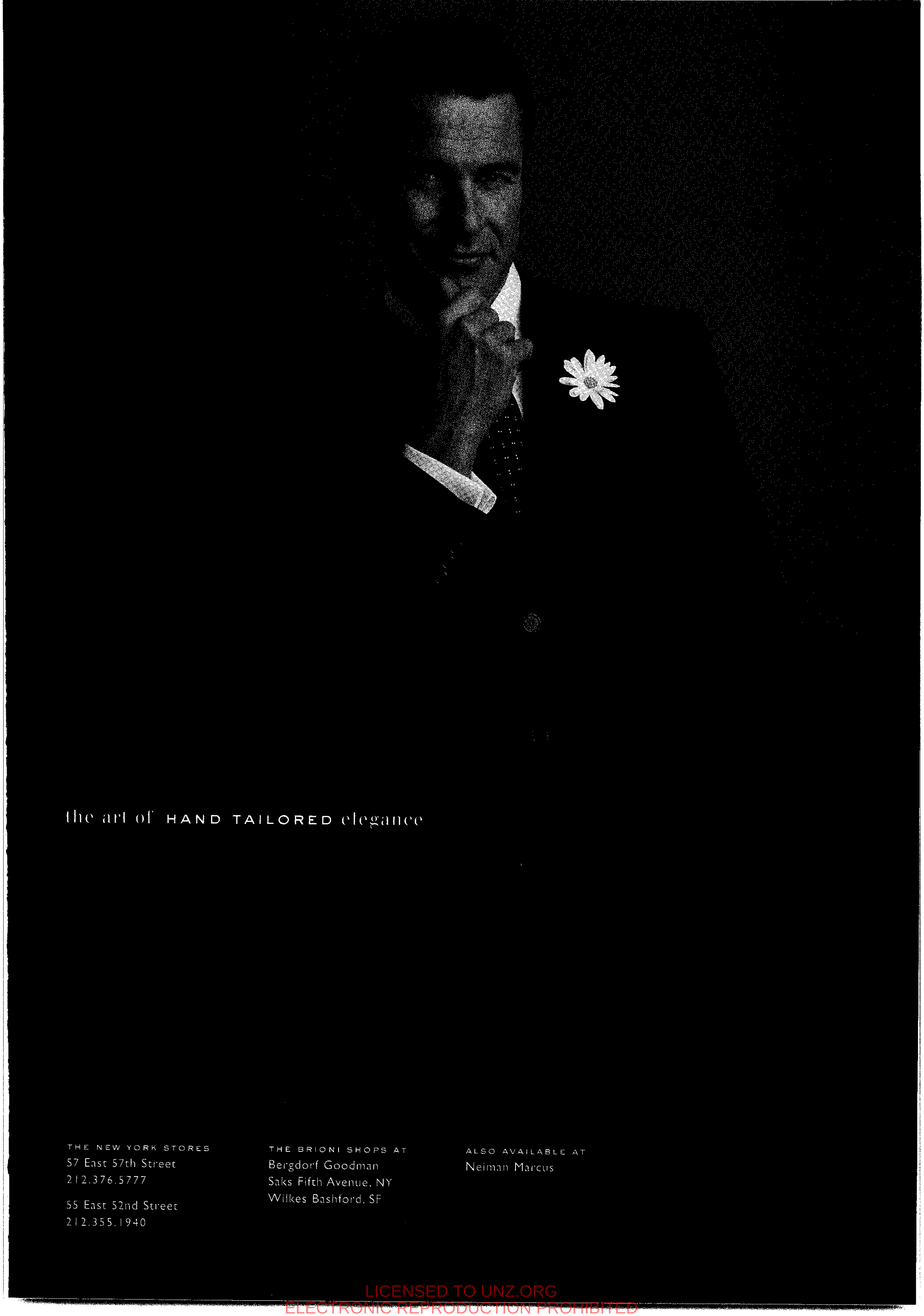

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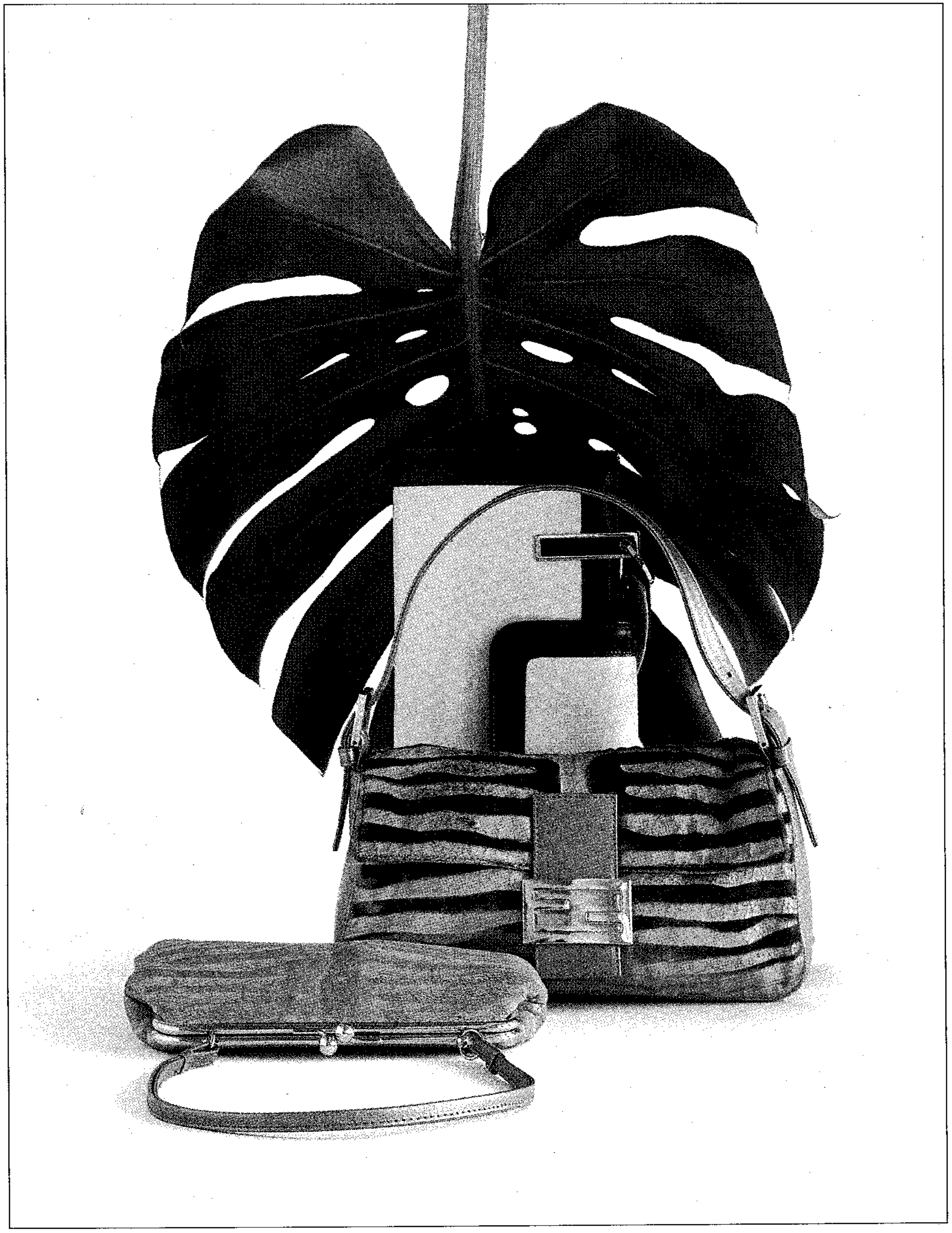

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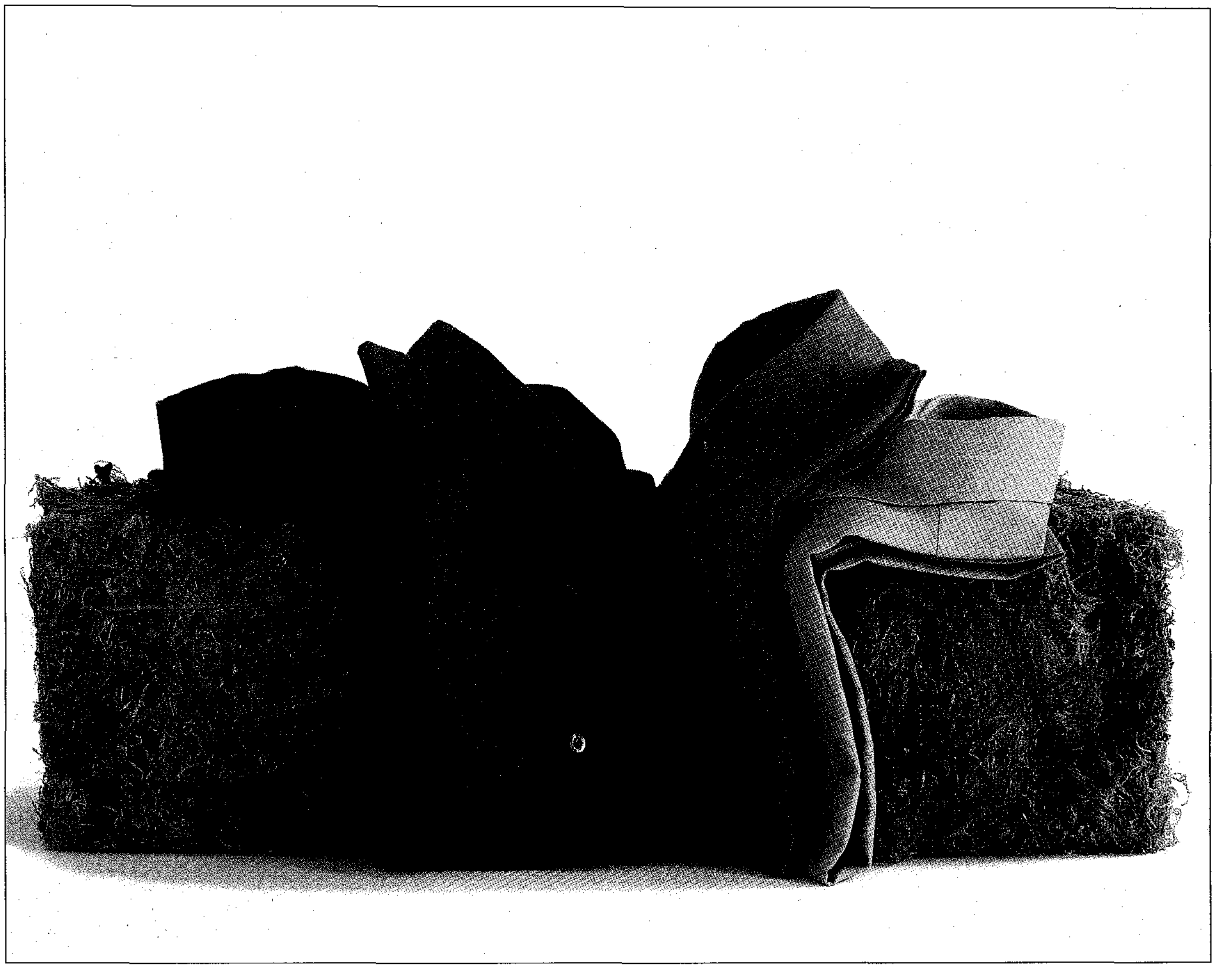

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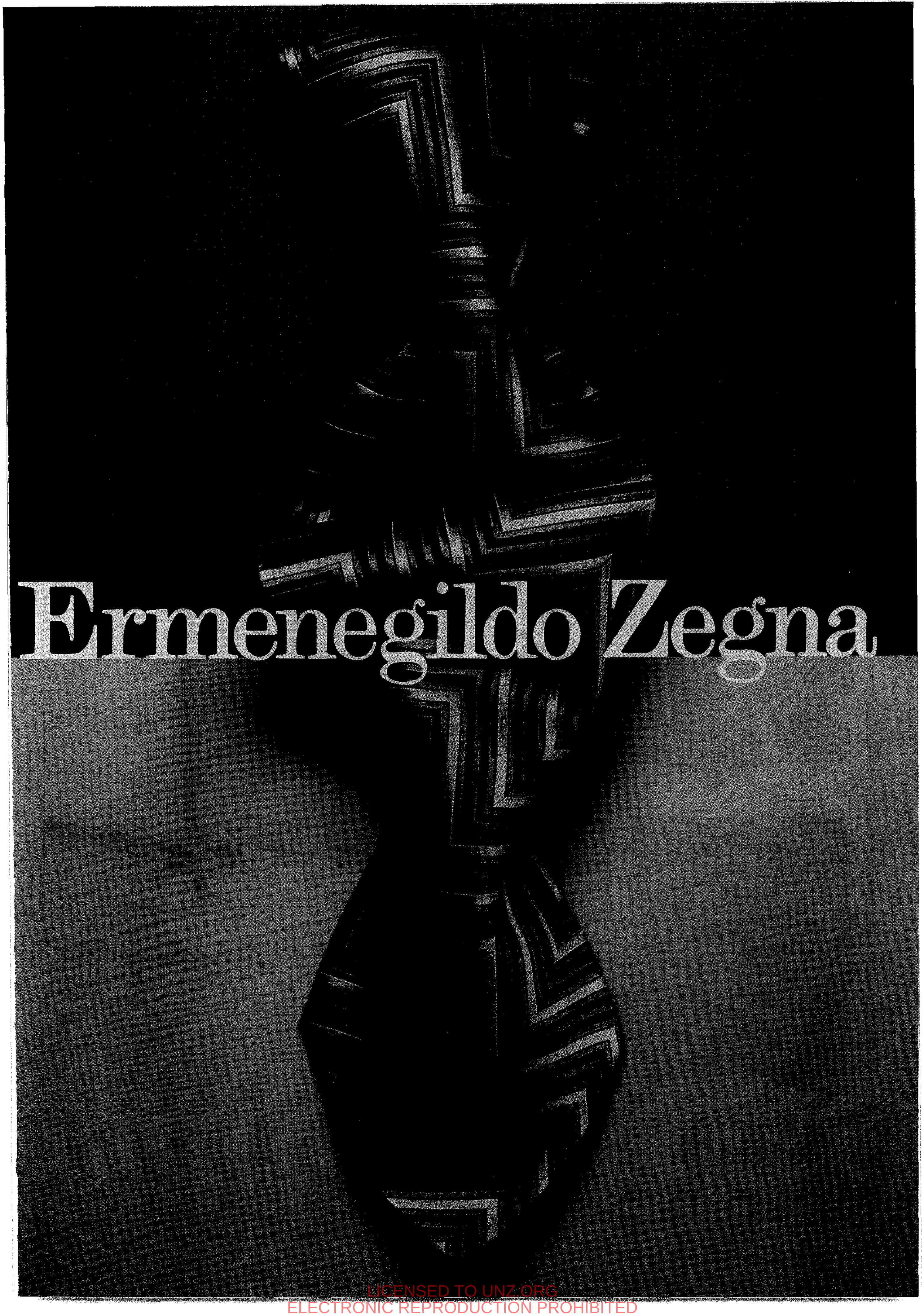
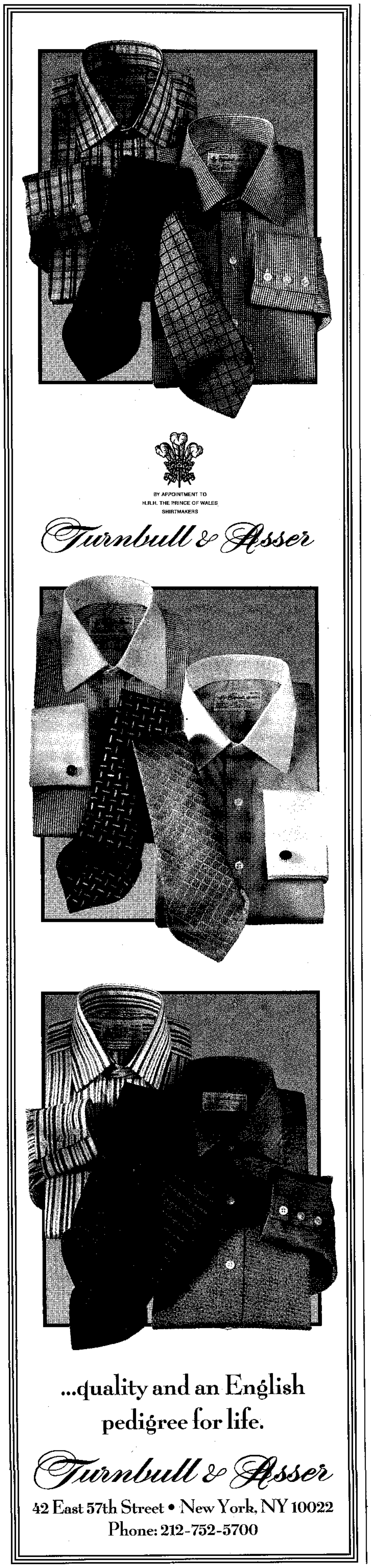
NATURAL-FIBER FABRICS INSPIRE CASUAL DRESS SHIRTS IN COLORS DRAWN FROM SPRING'S INVIGORATING PALETTE. **ERMENEGILDO ZEGNA**'S BLOOD-ORANGE COTTON SHIRT IS FLANKED BY, *LEFT*, **PAUL STUART**'S IRIDESCENT LINEN SHIRTS IN SOLID BLUE, AND, *RIGHT*, RED AND ORANGE.


Ermenegildo Zegna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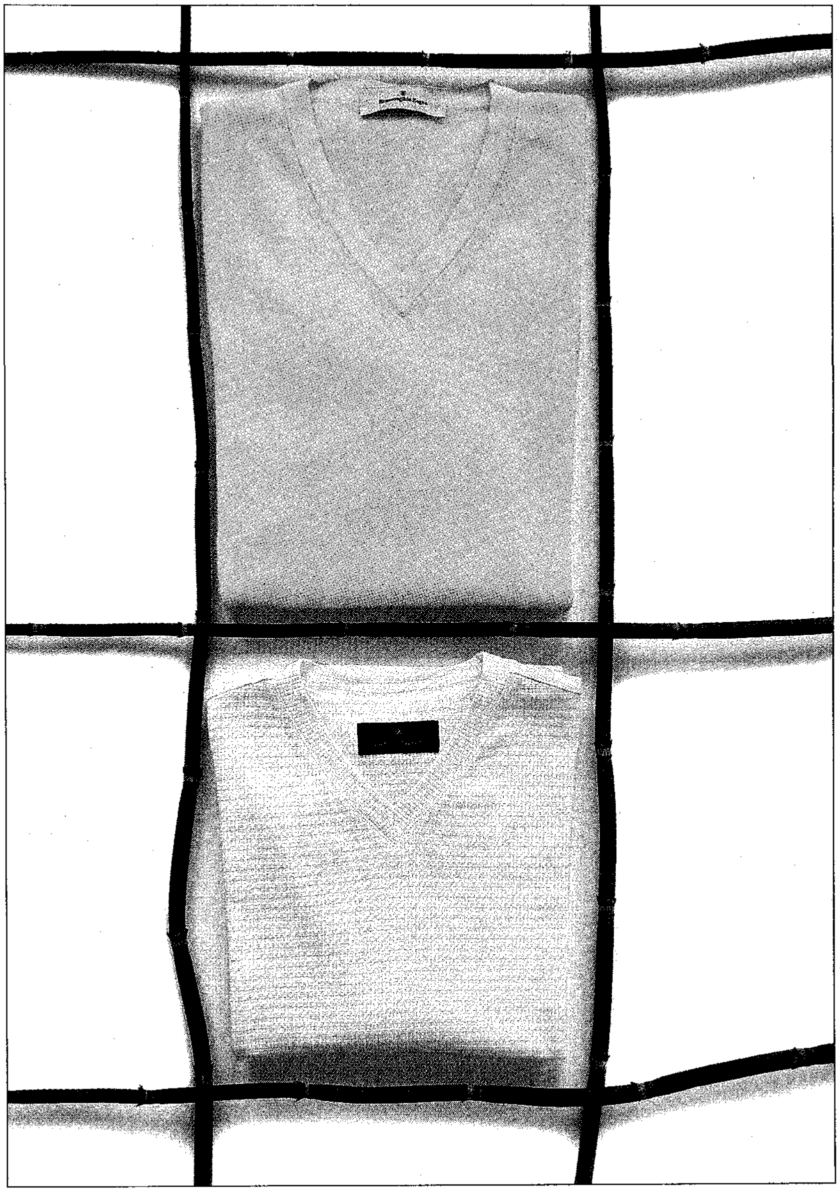

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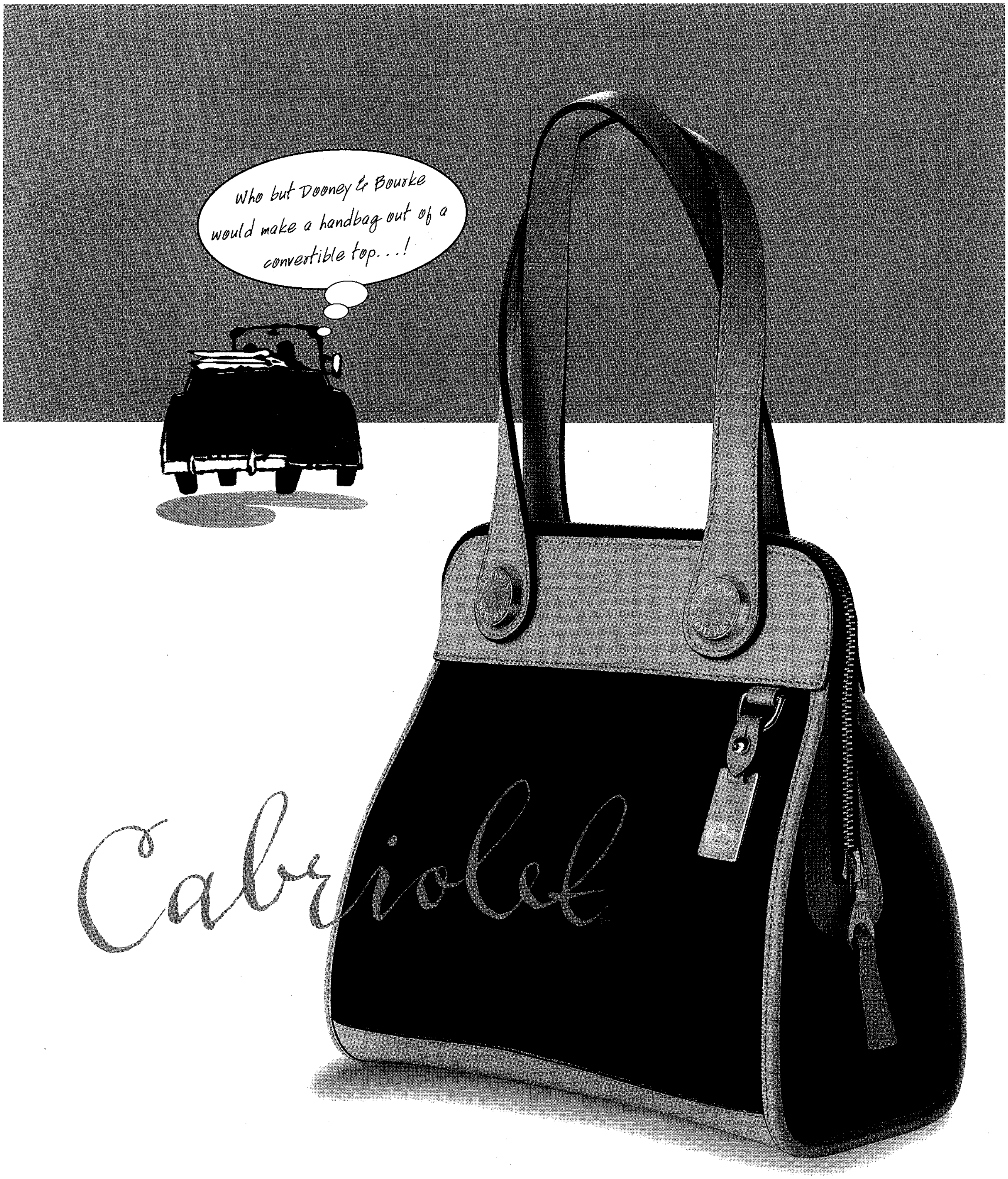
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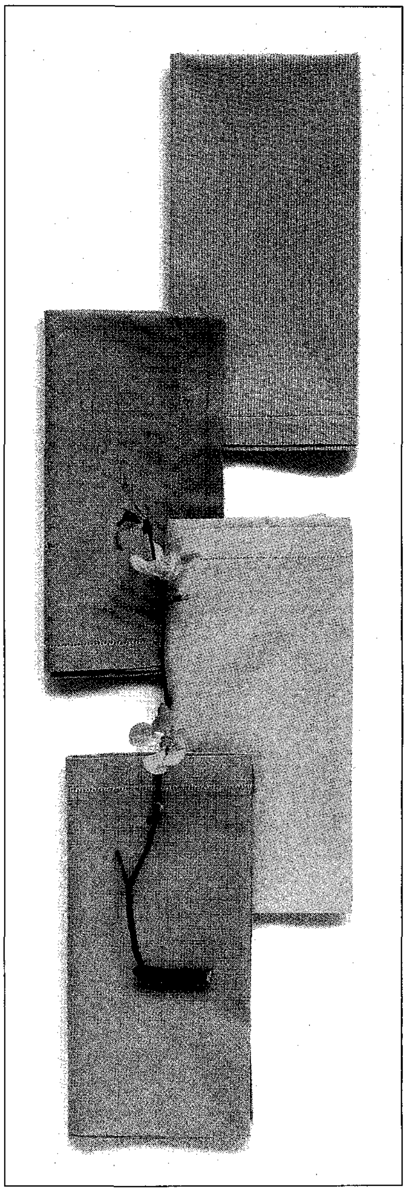

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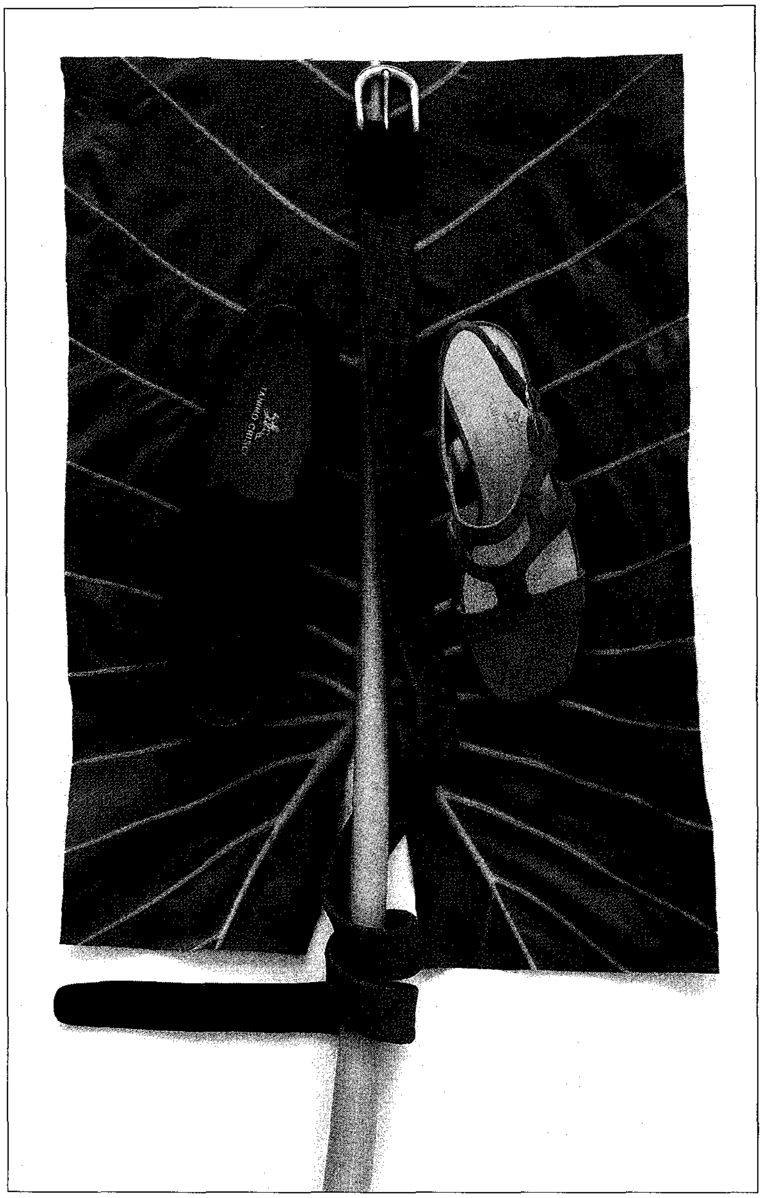

Leaf It To The Details

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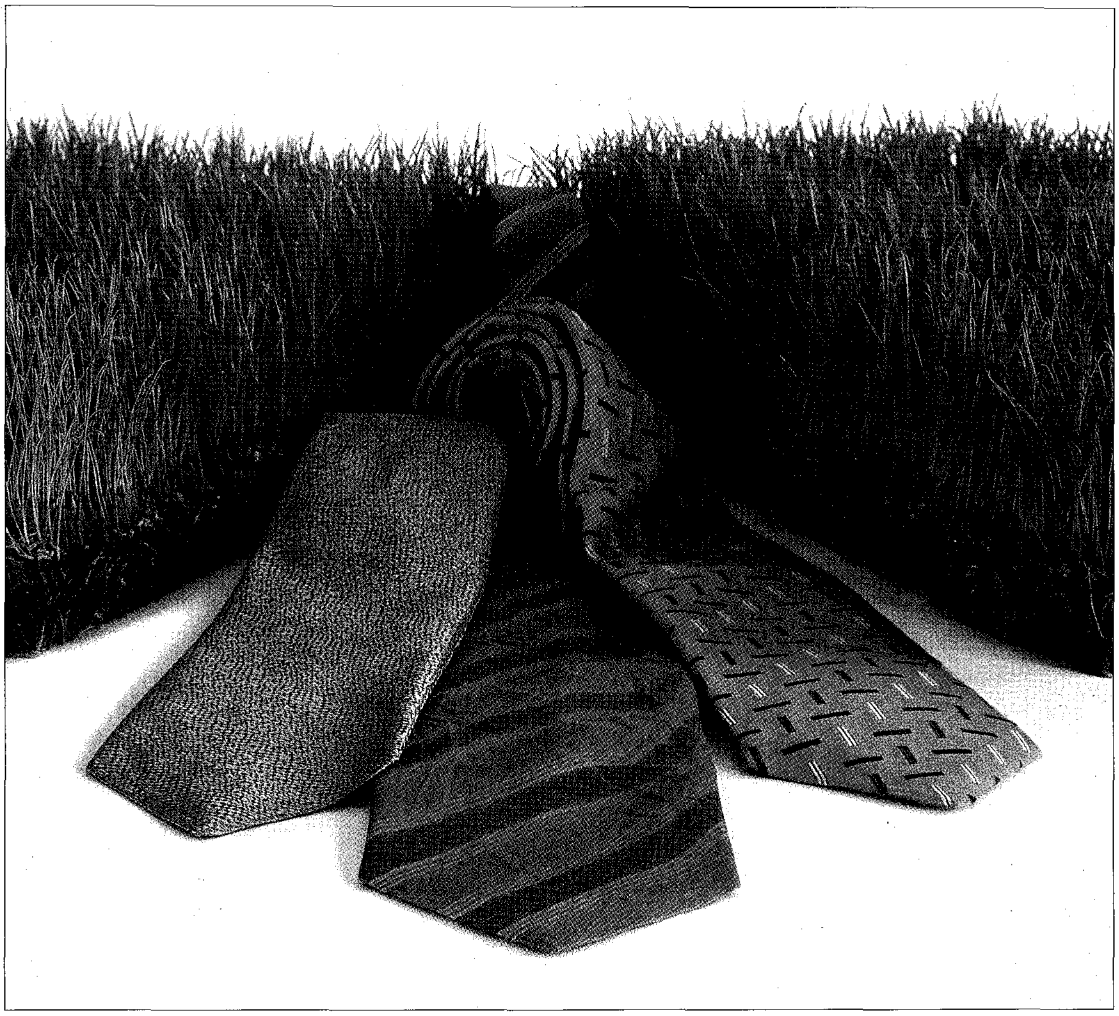

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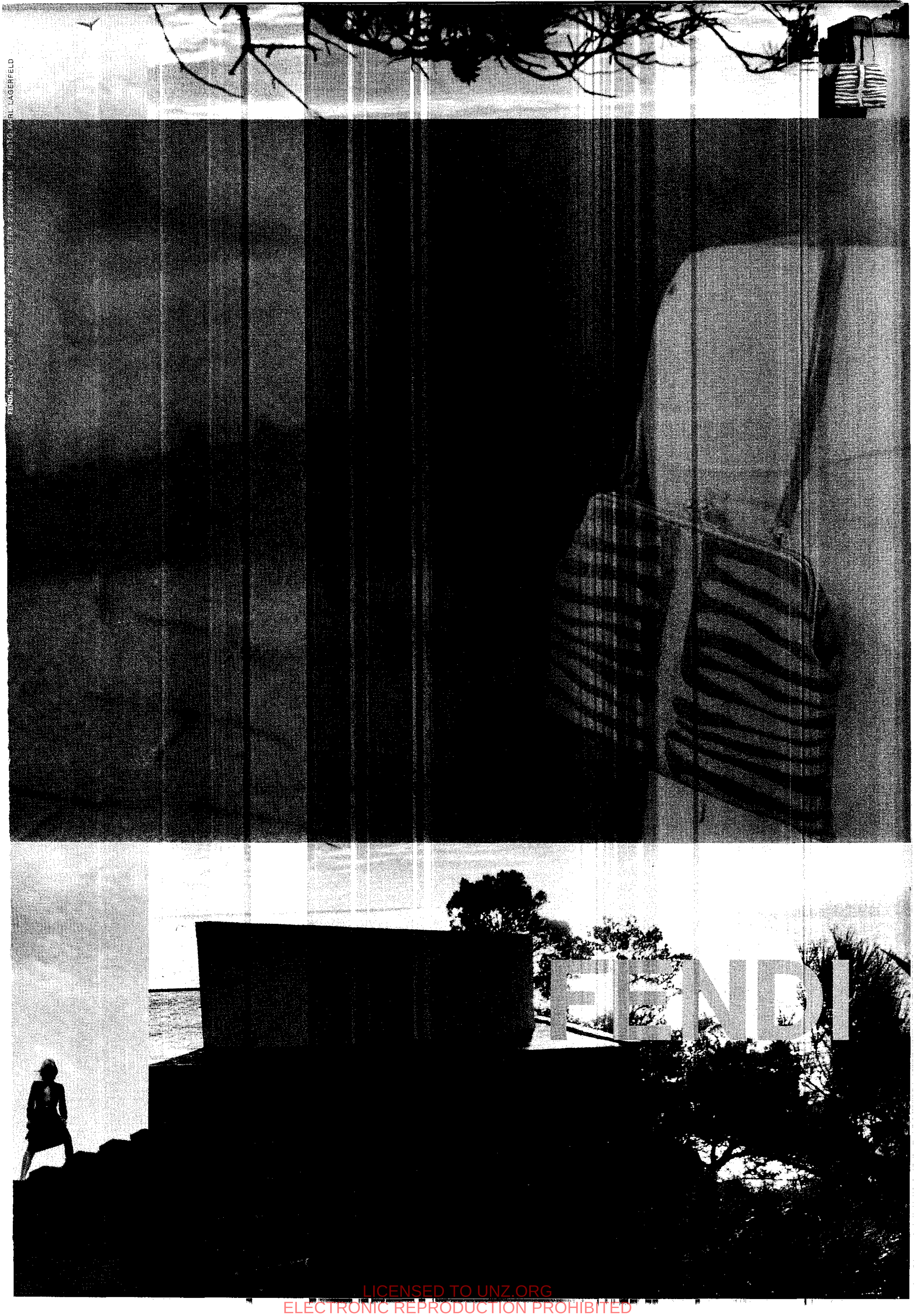
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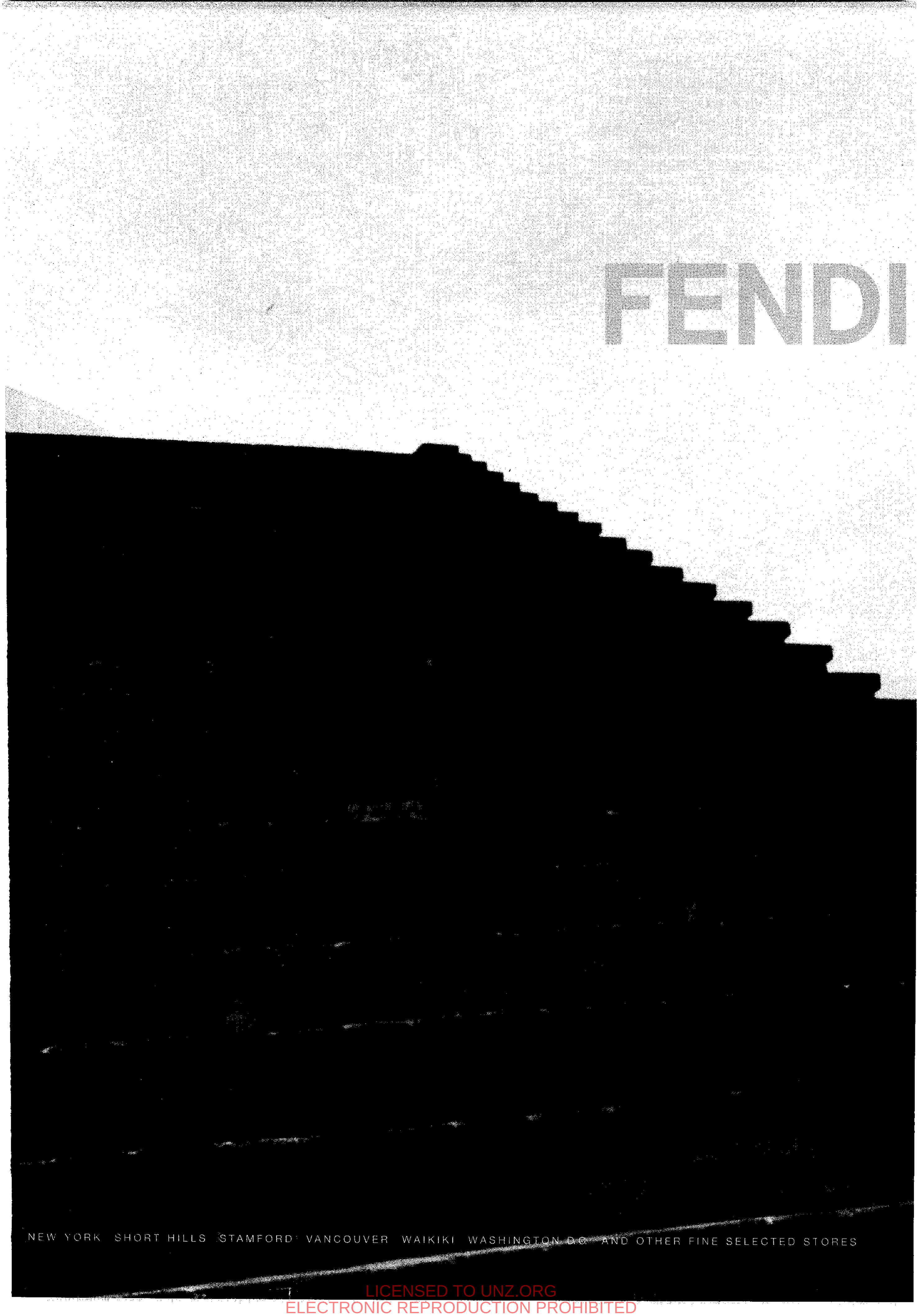

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Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—March 31 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "Capitaine Conan" (1996, Bertrand Tavernier; in French).

Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (864-5400)—A series of films that have won or been nominated for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film. March 31 at 7: "Eat Drink Man Woman" (1994, Ang Lee; in Mandarin)....March 31 at 9:15: "Strawberry and Chocolate" (†).

Anthology Film Archives, 32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—March 25-29 at 6: "Brigands" (1996, Otar Iosseliani)....¶A program of films directed by Vincente Aranda; in Spanish, with English subtitles. March 25 at 8:30: "The Girl with Golden Panties" (1979) and "The Cruel Ones" (1969)....March 26 at 8:30: "The Girl with Golden Panties" and "Fata Morgana" (1965)....March 27-28 at 8:30: "Sex Change" (1976) and "If They Tell You That I Fell" (1989)....March 29-30 at 8:30: "The Bilingual Lover" (1992) and "The Turkish Passion" (1994)....March 31 at 8:30: "Lovers" (1990) and "Intruder" (1993)....¶A program of films by Heinz Emigholz. March 26 at 8: "Normalsatz" (1981)....March 27 at 8: "The Meadow of Things" (1987)....March 28 at 8: "The Holy Bunch" (1991)....March 29 at 5: Three short films....¶March 28-29 at 2: "The Southerner" (†)....¶March 31 at 6: "The Castle" (1997, Michael Haneke)....¶March 31 at 7: "Siberiade" (1978, Andrei Konchalovsky; in Russian).

THEATRE ADDRESSES

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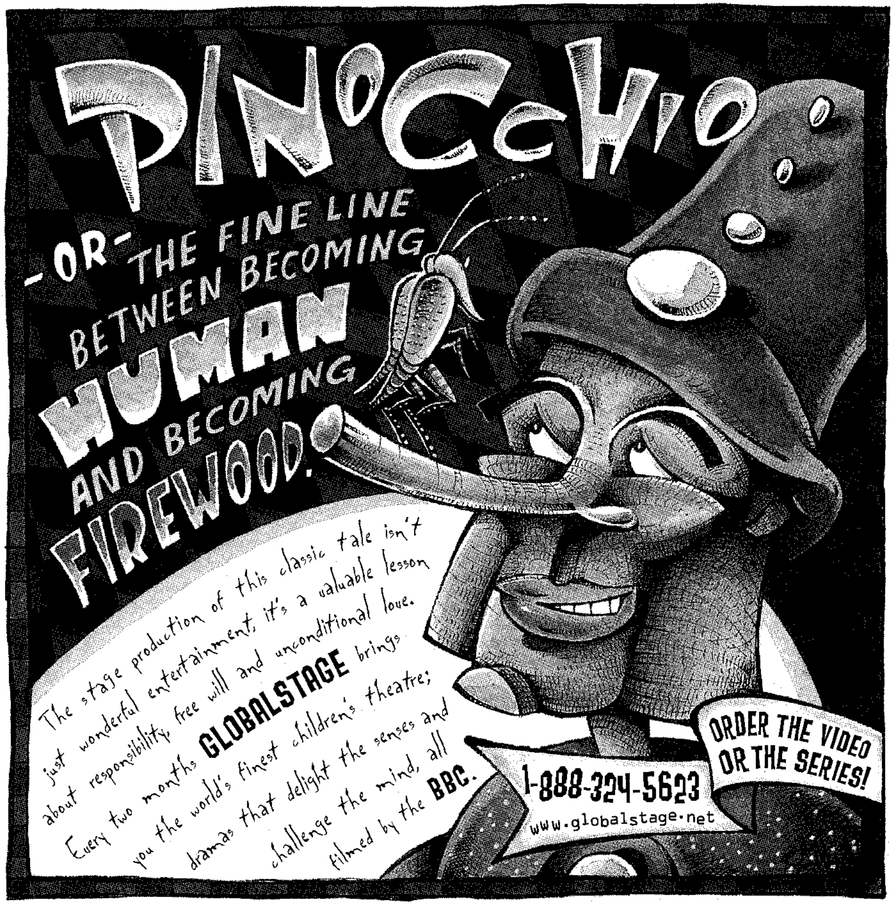
(For show times, call 777-FILM, except where noted.)

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St.
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Criterion Center, Broadway at 44th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
86th Street East Twin, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Embassy 1, 2, and 3, Seventh Ave. at 47th St.
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Guild, 33 W. 50th St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
Regency, Broadway at 67th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Showplace, 238 E. 34th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

THE BENCH

A pocket primer for the President, in case he's deposed again.

VIRTUALLY every witness who's about to be deposed gets a lecture from his or her lawyer delineating the basic rules of witness deportment. Surely Bob Bennett, President Clinton's attorney in the Paula Jones lawsuit, briefed his client on the usual procedures. What, then, accounts for the President's performance in his Paula Jones deposition, portions of which were made public last week? Although Clinton was at times a model witness, answering questions succinctly and directly, at other times he clean forgot some of the dos and don'ts:

1) If the question calls for a yes-or-no answer, answer yes or no.

Q. Do you know why she [Kathleen Willey] would tell a story like that if it weren't true?

The "correct" answer would seem to be a simple "no." Instead, Clinton responds at length and volunteers information that isn't asked for:

A. I did to her what I have done to scores and scores of men and women who have worked for me or been my friends over the years. I embraced her, I put my arms around her, I may have even kissed her on the forehead. There was nothing sexual about it. I was trying to help her calm down and trying to reassure her.

2) Don't speculate. If you don't know or don't remember, say so.

Q. When was the last time you spoke with Monica Lewinsky?

The right answer is probably "I don't know." Instead, Clinton describes a meeting he's evidently unsure of, then volunteers more unasked-for information:

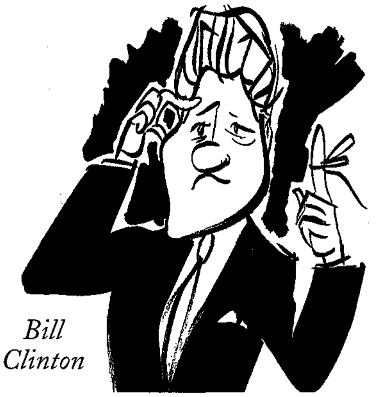
A. I'm trying to remember. Probably sometime before Christmas. She came by to see Betty [Currie, the President's secretary] sometime before Christmas. And she was there talking to her, and I stuck my head out, said hello to her.

Q. Stuck your head out of the Oval Office?

A. Uh-huh, Betty said she was coming by and talked to her, and I said hello to her.

Q. Was that shortly before Christmas or—

At this juncture, Clinton interrupts, hedges his earlier answer, and adds gratuitous information:



Bill Clinton

A. I'm sorry, I don't remember. Been sometime in December, I think, and I believe—that may not be the last time. I think she came to one of the, one of the Christmas parties.

3) Avoid phrases like "to the best of my recollection," "as memory serves me," or "I'm trying to be accurate." You either remember or you don't.

Q. Have you ever talked to Monica Lewinsky about the possibility that she might be asked to testify in this lawsuit?

The answer with respect to the December meeting, based on his earlier testimony about just sticking his head out, is presumably "no." But Clinton says:

A. I'm not sure, and let me tell you why I'm not sure. It seems to me the, the, the—I want to be as accurate as I can here.

4) Speak clearly and audibly.

The President continues:

. . . Seems to me the last time she was there to see Betty before Christmas we were joking about how you-all, with the help of the Rutherford Institute, were going to call every woman I'd ever talked to, and I said, you know—

Mr. Bennett: We can't hear you, Mr. President.

5) Be consistent. Don't change stories in mid-deposition.

Having already switched to a version in which he does more than stick his head out, Clinton continues to waffle before becoming all but incoherent.

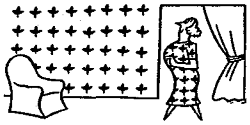
Mr. Clinton: And I said that you-all might call every woman I ever talked to and ask them that, and so I said you would qualify, or something like that. I don't, I don't think we ever had more of a conversation than that about it, but I might have mentioned something to her about it, because when I saw how long the witness list was, or I heard about it, before I saw it, but actually by the time I saw her name was on it, but I think that was after all this had happened. I might have said something like that, so I don't want to say for sure I didn't, because I might have said something like that.

By this time, Clinton has violated rules 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 in a single answer. Is this what they mean by spin?

—JAMES B. STEWART

DEPT. OF HOUSING

Christian Liaigre brings his pared-down Paris look to SoHo.



THE trouble with being an interior designer—as opposed to being, say, a painter or a sculptor—is that people mess up your work simply by living in it. This explains why Christian Liaigre was cringing as he sat, one recent afternoon, in the bar of the Hotel Montalembert, in Paris. *Ugh!* to the sweeping curtains, put up since he

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

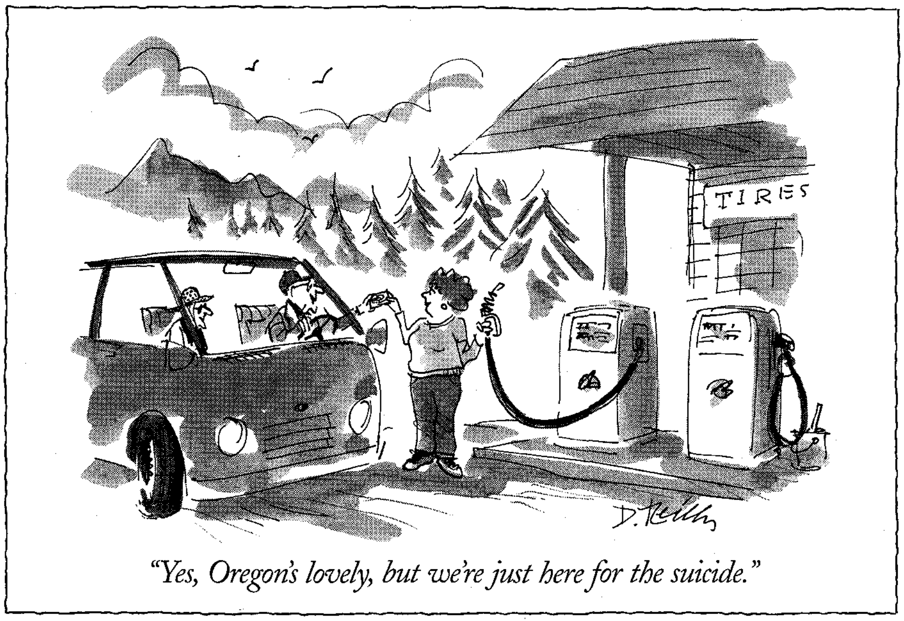
designed the room, ten years ago, and to the gaudy orange cushions someone had plunked on the couch. "Many things have changed—I apologize," said Liaigre, who was wearing a Prada corduroy suit over an oatmeal cashmere sweater.

Actually, the fact that you can, if you really must, tamper with Liaigre's design is part of his great appeal. His aesthetic is a kind of relaxed minimalism, one that forgives the slobby misplacement of a cushion or two. Liaigre is currently the person you most want to decorate your home, even if you don't realize it: he tends toward shades of beige on the walls, and uses wood, raw-looking fabrics, pastel-dyed leather, and vivid silks in his furniture, creating an extremely covetable, pared-down luxury. So far, he's designed the furniture in Marc Jacobs's SoHo store, Joseph Ettedgui's home and his Joseph stores in London, and André Balazs's new Mercer Hotel, in SoHo.

Liaigre, who is fifty-three, started out as a painter in Paris, but, finding the artist's life too solitary, he moved to the countryside and raised horses instead. Then, tiring of the "Madame Bovary" aspects of country life—"all the dinners with doctors"—he returned to Paris and launched an interior-design business. His signature styles—massive end tables cut from solid blocks of wengé wood from Gabon; low-slung, square-ended couches—bear the imprints of Africa and Asia, by way of his native La Rochelle, on France's Atlantic coast. "Where I lived, there were lots of shipmakers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries," he explained. "They brought a lot of things from Asia and Africa. And in the interiors of La Rochelle there was a lot of mixture—a commode from the eighteenth century with masks from Africa."

For the Mercer, Liaigre drew on the architectural details of loft living. A ceiling light is mounted on a metal rod with the electric cord wrapped around it, a reference to the old sprinkler systems tracing many SoHo ceilings. (Liaigre is contemptuous of the cast-iron-and-glass interior of the SoHo Grand, the neighborhood's other hotel. "It's a caricature of SoHo—it is like Disneyland," he said.) And in the Mercer, which officially opens in May but has been hosting a few addicts of the new who couldn't wait, Liaigre is not anticipating any unwelcome orange cushions. "André Balazs is a very sensitive man," he said. "He would never do that."

—Rebecca Mead



"Yes, Oregon's lovely, but we're just here for the suicide."

DEPT. OF DYNASTIES

A St. Patrick's Day visit with the forgotten Kennedy.

The news last week that Representative Joseph P. Kennedy had decided to retire from politics, at least for the moment, occasioned the usual smirks and lamentations that have accompanied similar Kennedy-family retrenchments for nearly twenty years now. Deaths are mourned; losses are assessed; the history of drugs, booze, and womanizing is rehearsed; John F. Kennedy, Jr., is drooled over. And the question is asked: Is this the end of the dynasty?

Joe Kennedy was a well-intentioned public servant, noted mostly for his charm and his teeth, which are enormous and blinding. But he was not the clan's most promising young politician. The best and the brightest of the young Kennedys is rarely mentioned when the lamentations begin—a news magazine once did a cover story on "ALL THE WILD YOUNG KENNEDYS" (or some such headline), and didn't deign to note her existence—but she does exist, and thrive, as Lieutenant Governor of Maryland: Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, Robert Kennedy's oldest child.

It seemed the right moment to check on Kathleen, who is quietly running for reëlection this year; she'll probably make the big move and run for governor of Maryland in 2002. We met at a Washington restaurant on St. Patrick's Day. She was wearing the requisite Kelly-green suit, but she is not a naturally flashy person; she doesn't ripple charisma, as some of her more dramatic siblings do. She does have the Kennedy look—the hawk nose and prominent teeth—and she carries in her DNA the part of her father that was, arguably, the most attractive: a deep and impatient moral intensity. She has long been married to the same person, David Townsend, a history professor, and they have four children—a placid domesticity that almost seems egregious given the family context.

"You've got to hear this," she says, grabbing my hand across the table and launching into a story about her drive to make public service a requirement in Maryland schools. "We had our first graduating class last spring"—each senior was required to perform seventy-five hours of public service—"and ninety-five per cent of them say they want to continue doing some form of service, because the experience meant so much to them. Can you imagine that!"

The Lieutenant Governor of Maryland, like all of her siblings, has been politically active since she was a zygote. But she first stepped out on her own in 1981, after a spell working on her uncle Teddy's Presidential campaign the previous year, by writing an Op-Ed piece in the New York *Times* that criticized secular liberals for their patronizing attitude toward religion. The column caught the attention of Charles Peters, the editor of the *Washington Monthly*, who had

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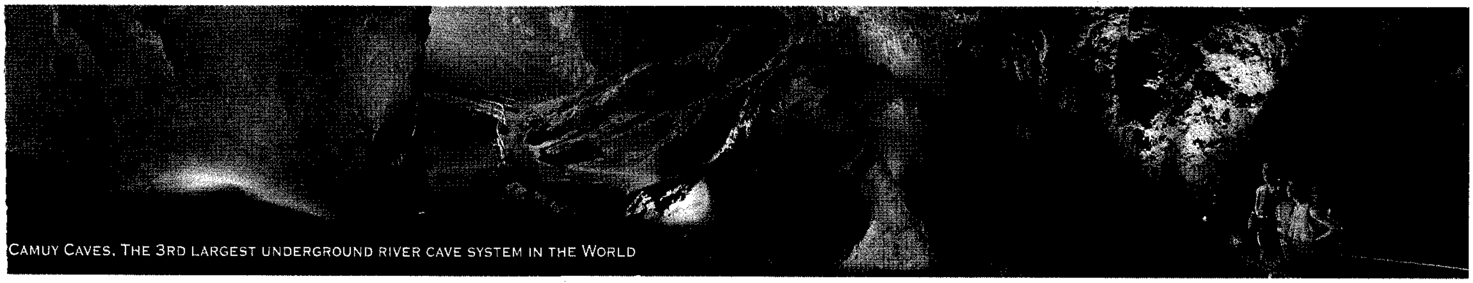

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her expand it for his publication. Peters says, "She combines all the best attributes of her father and the President—the intelligence, the caring, the courage."

There are places Townsend won't go. There are some things she just won't talk about. "We are one big happy family," she says of the Kennedys, with a clever smile. Still, Townsend's political career was scrunched a bit by her clan's insistence on primogeniture: in 1986, she had intended to run for Congress from the seat that John F. Kennedy once held in Massachusetts, but her younger brother, Joe, had the same ambition—and Kathleen acquiesced, and moved to Maryland (her husband's home state), where she ran for Congress and lost. She was a surprise addition to Parris Glendening's gubernatorial ticket in 1994, but she has proved to be an astute Lieutenant Governor, one who clearly has higher ambitions.

Kathleen Kennedy Townsend

I asked if she had noticed the Queen of England's recent decision to modify primogeniture—to allow the firstborn of either sex, not just the firstborn male, to rule—and she said, "You bet I did! . . . But was there a process? Did they have studies before she came out with that? Can she just change the rule—like *that*?" Yes. She can. —JOE KLEIN

LIFE IN HOLLYWOOD DEPT.

How Marlon Brando learned to get along with Oscar.

WATCHING the frenzied maneuverings among this year's Oscar contenders, I think back to 1952, when Elia Kazan and I took the Super Chief to L.A. to pitch my "On the Waterfront" script to Darryl Zanuck. I had been working on spec for almost two years, hanging out with the waterfront priest Father John Corridan and his embattled longshoremen, who were trying to stand up to their corrupt union. "What if Darryl doesn't like it?" I said.

"Stop worrying. It's his kind of picture," Kazan told me. "Think of 'The Grapes of Wrath.'"

But in L.A. there was no limo to meet us, and at the hotel there were no flowers in our room and no invitation to Palm Springs for the weekend to play croquet. Bad signs, I told Kazan. Monday afternoon, we waited in Zanuck's crowded outer office. Bella Darvi, a young and untried Polish-French actress, went in ahead of us. It seemed that everybody went in ahead of us. Finally, it was our turn.

"Boys, I'm sorry, but I didn't like a single thing about it," Zanuck told us. And that was that. Back at the office that the studio had issued us, we turned over the desk and liberated the typewriter. At the hotel, we were informed that we had been removed from the studio expense account. After every studio in town turned us away, we hooked up with Sam Spiegel, who was down on his luck after a flop. Marlon Brando had also rejected us, but after Spiegel talked United Artists into putting up eight hundred thousand dollars, with Frank Sinatra to play the Brando part, he went back to Brando and talked him into it. Then Sam spiegeled his way out of U.A. and on to Columbia, but still with the same near-strangulation budget.

Several months later, Kazan ran the film for Columbia's Harry Cohn, who was to decide how the studio would promote it. "Here's what happened," Kazan told me on the phone right afterward. "Just the three of us in the projection room: Harry and his new Latin number and me. They're all over each other. Then I hear some snoring. Then Harry got up and walked out. So we can forget studio support. All his money's on 'The Caine Mutiny.'"

Even with no publicity, the film did all right. People were even talking about a shot at the Oscar. Then the gossip columns started picking up grumbles from Brando, who had decided to speak his mind about the Oscar race. Did actors really need awards? he asked. Isn't artistic satisfaction in our work sufficient award? Hearst's Louella O. Parsons and the L.A. *Times*' Hedda Hopper hinted with sledgehammer subtlety: Did people who looked down on the Academy deserve its votes?

To quiet Marlon, Kazan and Spiegel dispatched an odd couple to California: me and Roger Donoghue, the young, articulate Irish ex-boxer from Yonkers who had coached Marlon on the body language of a fighter and had hit it off with him. Our simple message for our star: Shut up. Marlon was an underdog man. He really cared about injustice, to the Indians, to blacks—anybody getting pushed around. So we reminded him that thousands of dockworkers were literally praying that the picture would make a difference in their lives. Father Corridan and his fellow-priests at St. Xavier were lighting candles.

Between takes at the Goldwyn Studio, Marlon, now transformed into the suave Sky Masterson of "Guys and Dolls," listened. A few weeks later, he came with us to the Golden Globe Awards, at the Ambassador Hotel. On his best behavior, he was full of good will as he accepted the Best Actor award.

Still, on Oscar night Kazan and I felt like outsiders when we showed up at the NBC Century Theatre, in Manhattan. (The awards were simulcast from there and the Pantages Theatre, in Hollywood.) Among our competition were "A Star Is Born," "The Caine Mutiny," and "The Barefoot Contessa." To our astonishment, "Waterfront" swept, with eight Oscars, tying the record set by "Gone with the Wind." But we weren't enjoying ourselves. Accepting our awards, we were still looking back in anger, with no forgiveness for Zanuck or Harry Cohn or the others who had told us to go away.

Somehow, the more success we had, the angrier we got. We boycotted the official post-show party and threw our own, at a Chinese restaurant called the House of Chan. It was a raucous, unchic party, with more beer than champagne, the Oscars lined up on a table.

The next morning, Kazan and I got a telegram from Zanuck. I had been quoted in the *Times* on his mindless rejection of our script. His feelings were hurt, he said, because we had not acknowledged how much he had helped us.

As Oscar night grows bigger, if not better, now and then the low-budget, personal film—from "Waterfront" to "Good Will Hunting"—makes the whole overwrought and overproduced extravaganza worth our patience, and for a few moments restores our innocence.
—BUDD SCHULBERG

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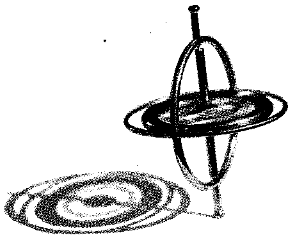

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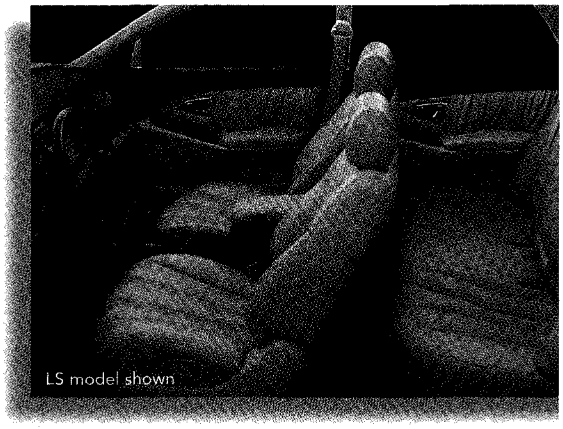

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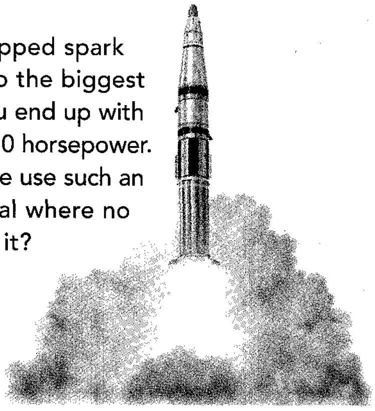

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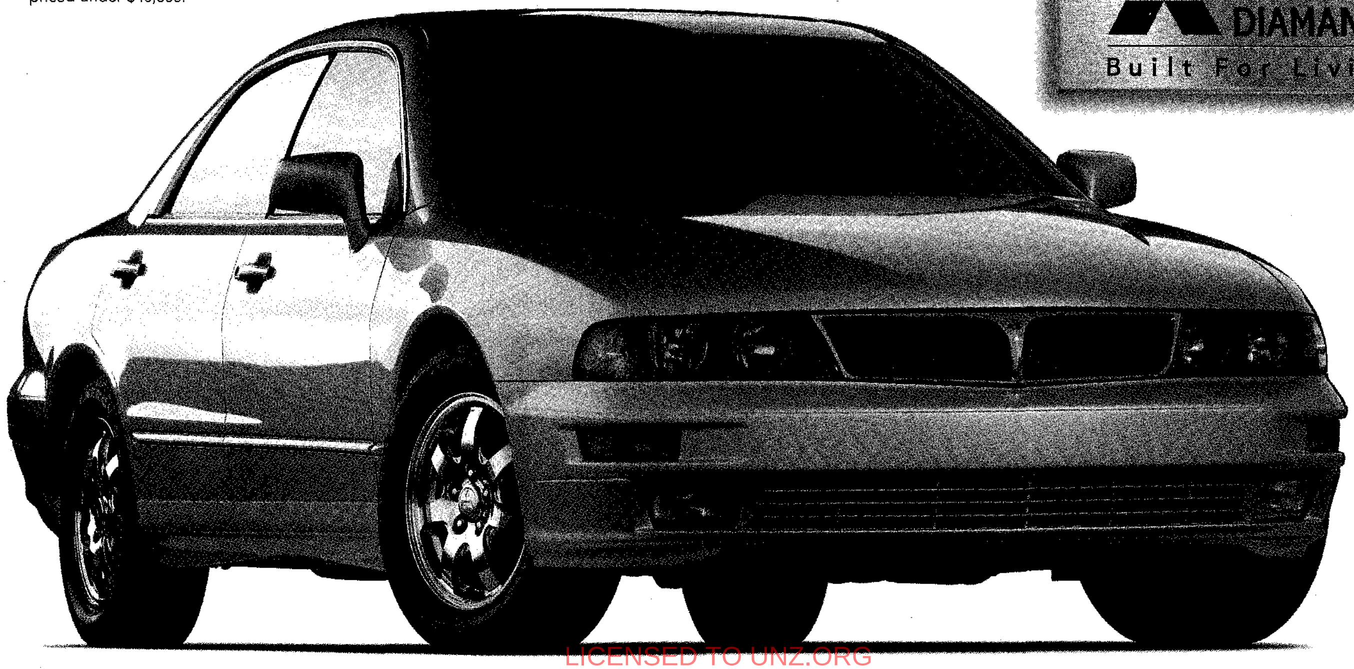


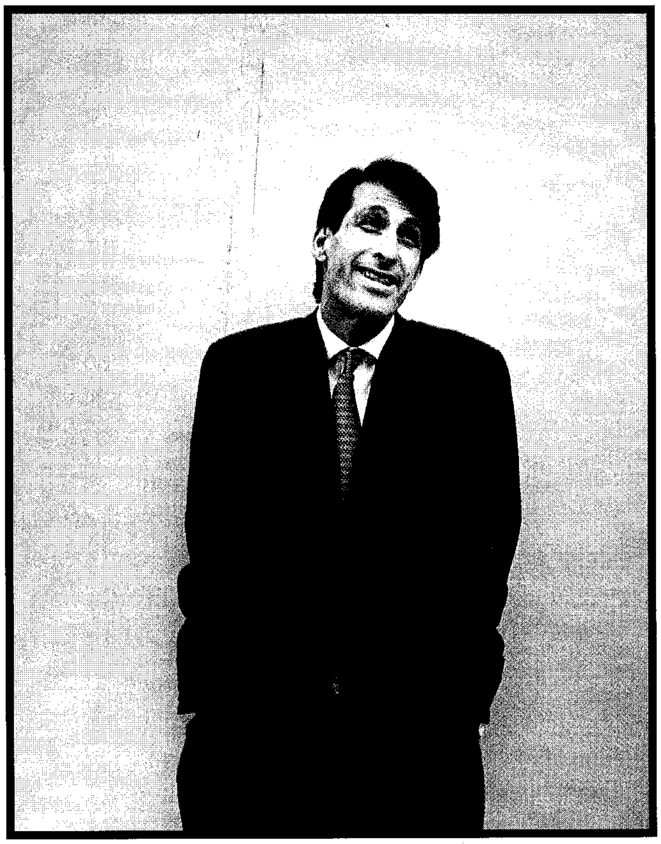
ANNALS OF PUBLISHING

THE HOLLYWOOD WAY

Michael Lynton has a plan to make people buy more books.

BY ROBERT S. BOYNTON

ON a recent afternoon, a group of writers and editors from Penguin Books took their seats in a midtown screening room for a preview of "The Prince of Egypt," the first animated film from the new Hollywood studio DreamWorks. As the lights went down, the orange Penguin logo flashed on the screen, and a lanky, collegiate-looking man, in button-down shirt, crew-neck sweater, and khakis, strolled to the front of the room.



Lynton argues that Penguin can become the Disney of the book-reading culture. Photograph by Bastienne Schmidt.

"Hi. My name is Michael Lynton, and I'm the chairman of Penguin Books," he said. "I saw a lot of animated movies in the ten years I worked at Disney, but I'll never forget seeing the first ten minutes of 'The Lion King' and feeling this shiver go up my spine. Well, I felt that same shiver when I saw the first ten minutes of 'The Prince of Egypt,' and I think it's going to be an incredible work of art."

For all Lynton's aesthetic appreciation of "The Prince of Egypt"—a cartoon that turns the story of Moses and the Ten Commandments into a buddy movie about the Hebrew prophet and the Pharaoh Ramses—his real interest in the movie was economic. According to his calculations, "The Prince of Egypt" will spawn a dozen children's books; already, one of the most celebrated authors in the field, Madeleine L'Engle, had been signed to write the lead title. One of the first deals Lynton concluded when he became chairman and C.E.O. of the Penguin Group, a year ago, was to publish books based on DreamWorks' upcoming movies.

As he reminded his audience, selling books the Hollywood way can be enormously lucrative. Recalling his experience as a publisher for Disney, he said, "The first animated-movie book we did at Hyperion was 'The Little Mermaid.' When Jeffrey"—Jeffrey Katzenberg, who was then president of Disney, and is now the co-head of DreamWorks—"asked how many copies we were planning, I told him twenty-five thousand. He said we should do a million, and I thought he was crazy. But we printed a million and a half copies and ended up selling almost two million." He added, with an aw-shucks grin, "By the time the film of 'Beauty and the Beast' came out, we were on the *Times* best-seller list."

The rise of Lynton, who is thirty-eight, to the chairmanship of one of the best-known international publishing companies is a remarkable success story, both for its rapid trajectory and for what it reveals about the changing nature of the book business. After getting a B.A. and an M.B.A. from Harvard, and working for a brief time on Wall Street as an investment banker, Lynton was recruited by Disney. At the age of twenty-eight, he was put in charge of Disney's new publishing division. At thirty-three, he became president of Disney's Hollywood Pictures. The offer to head Penguin came last year, shortly after he turned thirty-six.

At Penguin, the hope is that Lynton will bring not only the sort of marketing skills that his old boss, Michael Eisner, used to turn Disney into one of the world's most ubiquitous brand names but also a genuine instinct for literary properties. "When the conglomerates first bought publishing houses," the agent Andrew Wylie points out, "they installed people who had stronger business than literary training. Now they realize that they have to have both, and Michael is the perfect combination of the two." In big publishing, books are increasingly being regarded less as discrete properties than as one vital link in a media food chain that begins with an idea, takes early shape as a magazine article, gets fleshed out between book covers, gains bigger life on a movie or TV screen, and enters the hereafter as a videocassette or the inspiration for a toy. In this regard, Lynton seems an ideal manager. As Jeff Berg, the chairman of the talent agency I.C.M., told me, "I think of Michael more as a media than as a publishing executive. He appreciates the fact that media drives media, and if you have valuable properties in one area, like books, you can extend your brand name into others."

IN a sense, Lynton's arrival at Penguin can be seen as the reinvigorating of an old tradition. Penguin was founded by the publisher Allen Lane in London, in 1935, and its mission was to bring inexpensive quality books to the masses. The pocket-size paperbacks sold for sixpence each (the price of ten cigarettes) and were color-coded—blue for biography, green for detective fiction, orange for novels—to make book shopping less intimidating. Lane was as shrewd as he was idealistic; with "War and Peace," for example, he printed fewer copies of Volume 2 than of Volume 1, on the assumption that not many readers would get that far. Three million Penguins were sold in the first year—a phenomenon that signalled "the emergence of a new social habit on a large scale," according to the London *Times*. Penguin became synonymous with good literature at a good price. A brand was born.

In 1978, when Peter Mayer, Lynton's predecessor, took over Penguin, he quickly broadened Lane's vision by bringing more aggressive marketing and business practices to what was by then a financially ailing firm. Under Mayer, Penguin acquired New American Library, Hamish Hamilton, and a half-dozen smaller houses on both sides of the Atlantic. Mayer transformed Penguin into a truly international publisher, bolstering its small United States presence and establishing branches in India and South Africa to supplement its offices in Australia and New Zealand. Mayer also expanded Penguin's classics to include more international and contemporary writers, adding such controversial titles as "Fanny Hill" and "On the Road." By the time he left, in 1996, he had tripled the number of Penguin Classics titles, to fifteen hundred; they continue to sell around twenty-five million copies each year.

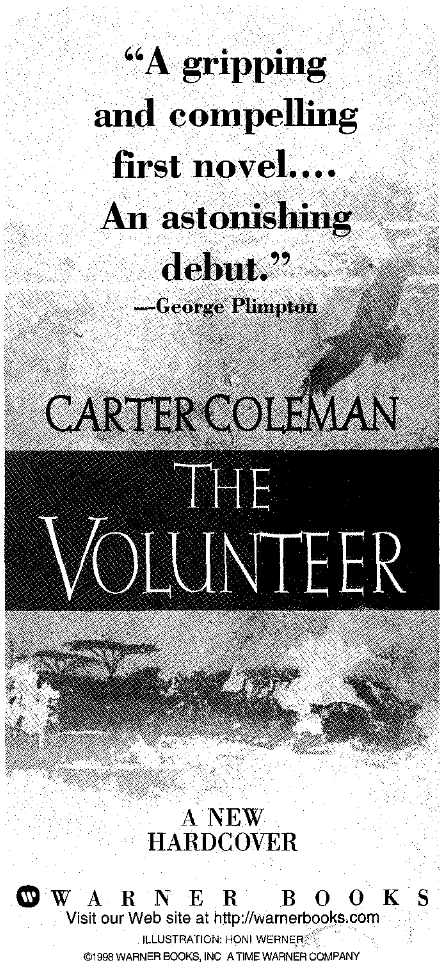
In the clubby world of publishing, the news that a "Hollywood type" was taking over Penguin caused some dismay. With Lynton at Penguin, a writer for the London *Independent* warned, "our children will be curling up in Virginia Woolf pajamas, beneath colorful Dostoyevsky duvets." Lynton wasted no time in shaking things up. During his first week on the job, he agreed to buy the Putnam Berkley Group—a three-hundred-and-thirty-six-million-dollar acquisition, which created the second-largest English-language publishing firm in the world. At the same time, Lynton showed deftness in dealing with a serious embarrassment. While the Putnam deal was being put together, it was discovered that a Penguin accountant had been giving booksellers illegal discounts and defrauding the company for the past five years. Lynton handled the problem openly and swiftly; Penguin immediately wrote off a hundred and sixty-three million dollars, which included a twenty-five-million-dollar fine to the American Booksellers Association.

Given Penguin's tradition of balancing economic profitability and cultural prestige, Lynton's decision to acquire the unabashedly commercial house of Putnam makes eminent sense. The merger immediately put Penguin Putnam on an equal footing with Random House, Simon & Schuster, and Bantam Doubleday Dell, and it has already resulted in savings of more than twenty million dollars in back-office costs. Moreover, such best-selling Putnam authors as Tom Clancy, Patricia Cornwell, Dick Francis, and Amy Tan have brought the kind of lucrative hardcover front list that Penguin, with its dependency on backlist paperback titles, had sorely lacked.

Perhaps most important, with Putnam came its C.E.O., Phyllis Grann, whose talent for spotting and nurturing best-selling authors had made her company one of the most profitable in the business. When MCA, Putnam's erstwhile corporate owner, told Grann that it wanted to get out of publishing, Penguin was the first potential buyer she talked to. "We had maxed out," she told me recently. "I was looking for someone who would think of ways to grow beyond what we were capable of, to expand beyond just selling more books. I think totally inside the box, and I needed someone like Michael, who can think outside it."

The day-to-day publishing business of Penguin Putnam is now run by Grann, while Lynton takes care of strategic, long-range issues. When Tom Clancy wanted an on-line, interactive game tied to his books, it was Lynton who arranged for Pearson, Penguin Putnam's corporate parent, to fund it. "Michael came up with a piece of the puzzle that I couldn't have," Grann said. "And without it we might have lost Clancy."

A STREAMLINED mass of chrome and glass, the Saatchi & Saatchi Building sits on a windswept corner of Hudson Street like a spaceship poised for lift-off. Lynton's office, on the fourth floor, mirrors the building's self-conscious modernism. Blond-wood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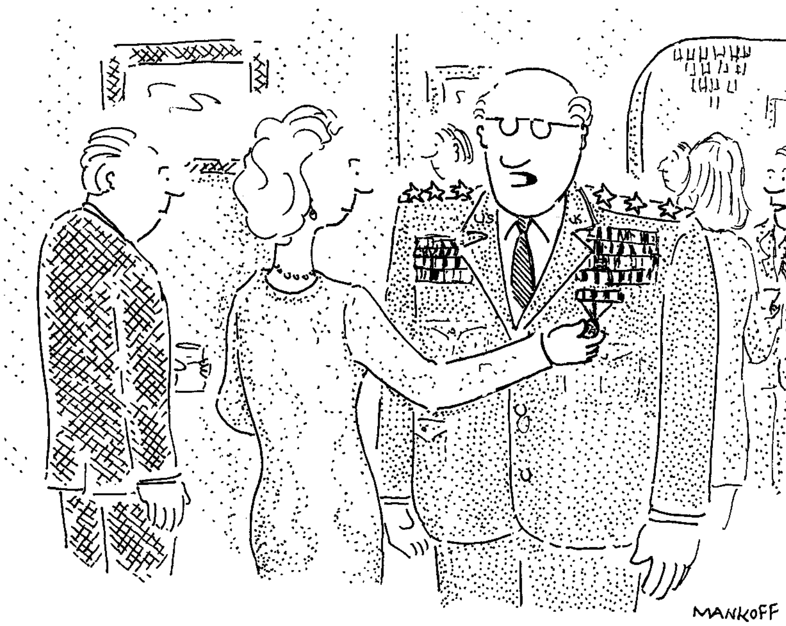


"Take it easy—that one's attached to my nipple."

• •

furniture is scattered across an off-white rug. Photographs of Lynton's wife, children, and parents lean against the tinted windows. A wall of Penguin paperbacks and a hardcover set of the Iliad and the Odyssey provide the only reminders that you're in a publisher's office.

Lynton, who has rather sad, Pacino-like eyes, a broad mouth, and shaggy brown hair, looks less like an executive than like a post-adolescent character actor. When I asked, by way of small talk, what stars he had got to know in Hollywood, he looked uncomfortable, and promised to get back to me with some names. (He didn't.) Eventually, I realized that Lynton, despite his studied modesty, knows just about everybody, from Warren Beatty to Gabriel García Márquez. Without seeming to be disingenuous, he portrays each of his relationships as merely the result of serendipity. According to all reports, Lynton has mastered the art of "simply finding" himself at the center of things. "Michael has an ability to get close to people, no matter who they are," the head of Hyperion Press, Bob Miller, says. "He's always able to suss out the important players."

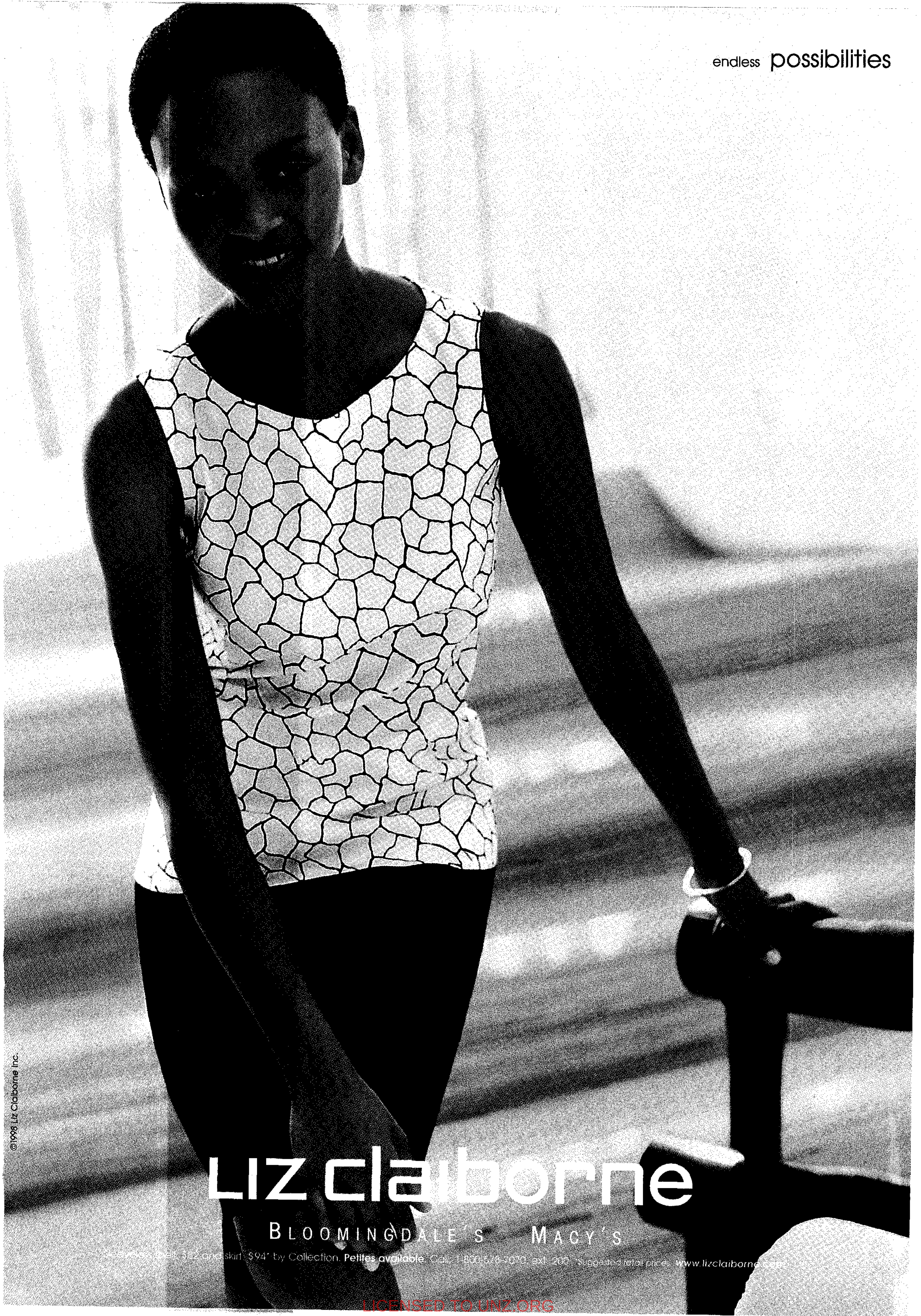
Lynton's regular-guy manner has done very well for him in a world where ego displays are the norm. He often uses the flattering conversational technique of beginning his next sentence by repeating your previous words; he peppers his conversation with cozy Yiddishisms; and he is given to using expressions like "Here's where the rubber meets the road" and "Let's talk turkey." Steve Burke, a former Disney executive, who had brought Lynton to Hollywood and who is now the president of broadcasting at ABC, told me that Lynton's refusal to acquire the usual Hollywood flamboyance gave him immediate distinction.

Lynton loves talking about books. Although he doesn't sign new authors himself, he is constantly alert to what will make a good story. In one of our conversations, he picked up a set of galleys of "Bridget Jones's Diary," the fictional chronicle of a year in the life of a neurotic single thirty-something that has been a No. 1 best-seller in Britain. It had attracted no American publisher until Lynton came across it in London. "I read half of it on the plane, and thought it was very funny," he said. The book's success in Britain points to the kind of broad-based literary movement that he wishes existed in the United States. "There is this group of young British writers, like Helen Fielding, Nick Hornby, and Alex Garland, who have found a much larger mass audience than their equivalents have here," he said. "I think part of the reason is that they are so light and playful. They make fun of themselves, and don't have such a dark view of the world."

Still, Lynton is cautiously optimistic that things will get better in this country, because he perceives a renewed interest in books among baby boomers here. The trick of catering to them, he believes, is to persuade them that they are getting their money's worth—not just by offering them fine literary fiction and poetry but by providing the "best of type" in every genre. "What these baby boomers are all looking for is quality in media," he says. "You see evidence of this in the popularity of something like A&E biographies, in the fact that VH1 is playing older music, and in all the serious fiction and nonfiction on the best-seller list."

LYNTON'S background seems ideal for a job that requires him to move constantly between Europe and America, between "high" and "low" tastes. His parents were wealthy German Jews, who fled to The Hague in 1933 to escape Hitler. Lynton's maternal grandfather had bribed a German officer to warn him before the family's holdings in Dusseldorf were to be confiscated; one night, therefore, he loaded an entire machine-tool factory he owned onto fifty box-cars and moved it to Holland. Most of the family went on to the United States when the Netherlands was invaded. When Lynton's father, Max-Otto Ludwig Lowenstein, joined the British Army, his commander suggested that he change his name, in case he should be captured. He took the name Lynton, moved to the United States, then returned to England, where Michael was born, in 1960. Nine years later, the Lyntons went back to Holland, where they established the headquarters of the family business, Hunter Douglas, which is the largest maker of window coverings in the world.

Lynton attended an international school in The Hague, transferred to Phillips Exeter Academy, in New Hampshire, for his senior year, and from there went on to Harvard. At Harvard, he lived in a jock dorm—Kirkland House—and when he wasn't playing rugby he was building sets at the Loeb Theatre for the avant-garde productions of Peter Sellars. His best friend at Harvard, Janno Lieber, recalls, "Michael was a kid from Holland who didn't appear to be foreign, and a genteel European who lived in the closest thing Harvard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had to 'Animal House.' He always searches out authentic types of one kind or another, even if they are extremely different from him."

After graduating from Harvard, in 1982, Lynton marched off to Wall Street. As an associate in the investment-banking firm of First Boston, he had a front-row seat for the New York of the go-go eighties. The combination of long working hours and extravagant night life soon convinced him that he didn't want to be a New York banker. "All that 'Bright Lights, Big City' stuff made me realize that I hated going out every night," he recalls. "I spent most evenings eating at Big Nick's, on Second Avenue, and then going home to read in bed."

When Lynton's sister, Lili, announced that she was going to Harvard Business School, he decided to join her. He disliked business school so much, though, that he almost didn't return for the second year. When he did come back, his sister agreed to leave the answers to the previous day's homework in his mailbox each morning.

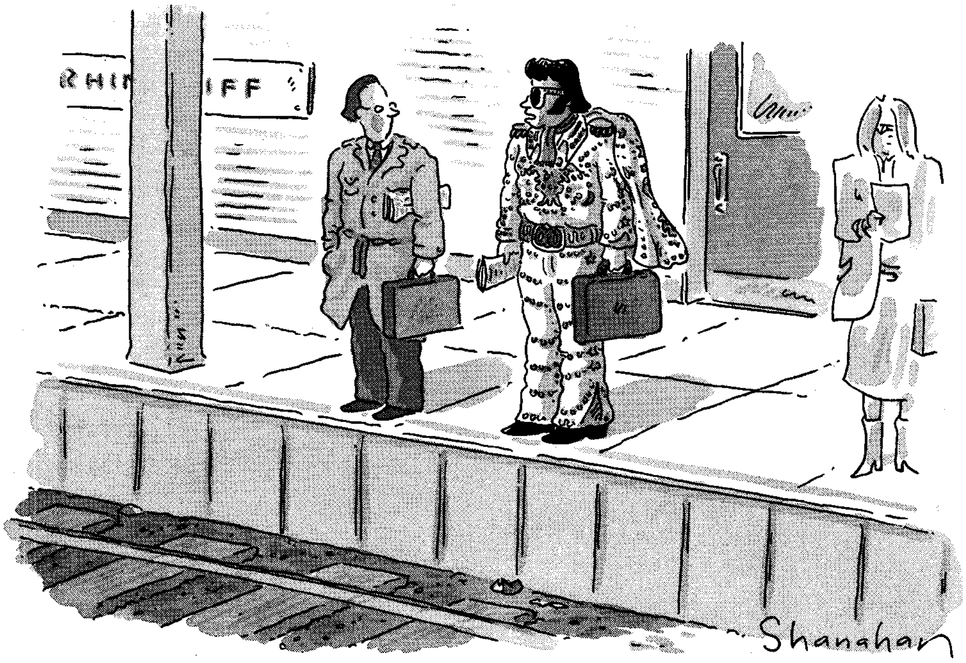
IN 1987, having got an M.B.A., Lynton was recruited by Disney, whose chairman, Michael Eisner, was looking for a cadre of young executives who could come up with new ways of expanding the Disney franchise. Lynton speaks warmly of his time with Disney. "We felt like the group that came into Ford with McNamara after the war," he says. "Nothing new had been done for a long time, so there was lots of opportunity." Richard Nanula, who came to Disney around the same time and is now the company's chief financial officer, recalls, "If you had a good idea, you could get it discussed that afternoon and get a decision that week. We used to say, 'The deal drives the day.'"

As a boy in Holland, Lynton had loved comic books, and many of his favorites were based on Disney characters. He had been especially fond of *Topolino*, a Disney comic book licensed to the Italian publisher Mondadori. At Disney, Lynton launched *Disney Adventures* magazine, an American version of *Topolino*, and its circulation quickly reached a million. Other titles—*Family Fun, Discover,* and *Family PC*—were bought or created; before long, Disney had a full-fledged magazine division.

In 1989, Lynton established two imprints for children's books and Hyperion Press, an adult trade house. When he was barely twenty-eight, he moved back to New York to assemble a staff for them. Hyperion's first books had strong movie tie-ins. In addition to drawing on Disney's animated movies (initially, sixty per cent of Hyperion's revenue came from Disney copyrights), Lynton cut a deal with the producer Harvey Weinstein to publish screenplays under Weinstein's Miramax imprint. Screenplays had previously sold poorly, but Miramax's first screenplay, "The Piano," sold seventy-six thousand copies, and a subsequent novelized version sold over a hundred thousand copies. Lynton refused to be confined by the old rules of publishing. Brian DeFiore, a former editor at Hyperion who is now the publisher of Villard Books, recalls, "When we were negotiating a large contract, Michael brought in a record-publishing contract to analyze how it was structured and see whether there were any other rights or options we could get." On another occasion, Lynton advanced a writer ten thousand dollars just for exploratory research on a book proposal, the way a movie producer might option a story.

By 1994, a string of box-office duds had convinced Eisner that Hollywood Pictures, one of Disney's three studios, needed Lynton's leadership. Returning to L.A., Lynton made a splash by purchasing the rights to Nicholas Evans's novel "The Horse Whisperer," for three million dollars, with Robert Redford as its director and star. Hollywood was impressed: Lynton had decided to buy the Evans book on the basis of a hundred-page manuscript that had been surreptitiously faxed to him from the Frankfurt Book Fair. In 1995, three of Lynton's Hollywood Pictures releases—"The Santa Clause," "While You Were Sleeping," and "Crimson Tide"—earned more than two hundred and fifty million dollars domestically. Lynton himself put several projects into production, including "The Rock" and "Mr. Holland's Opus," which proved profitable.

In spite of this success, Lynton's presence was resented by some Hollywood insiders: they felt that he hadn't paid sufficient dues. Things became difficult when Eisner underwent bypass surgery, and Katzenberg left the company on bitter terms. Rumors began circulating that Hollywood Pictures would close, and it ultimately did. "For as long as I lived in L.A., I was never entirely comfortable there," Lynton told me, choosing his words carefully. "Movies are a black hole. When a conversation peters out



"Of course, on casual Fridays I'm the fifties Elvis."

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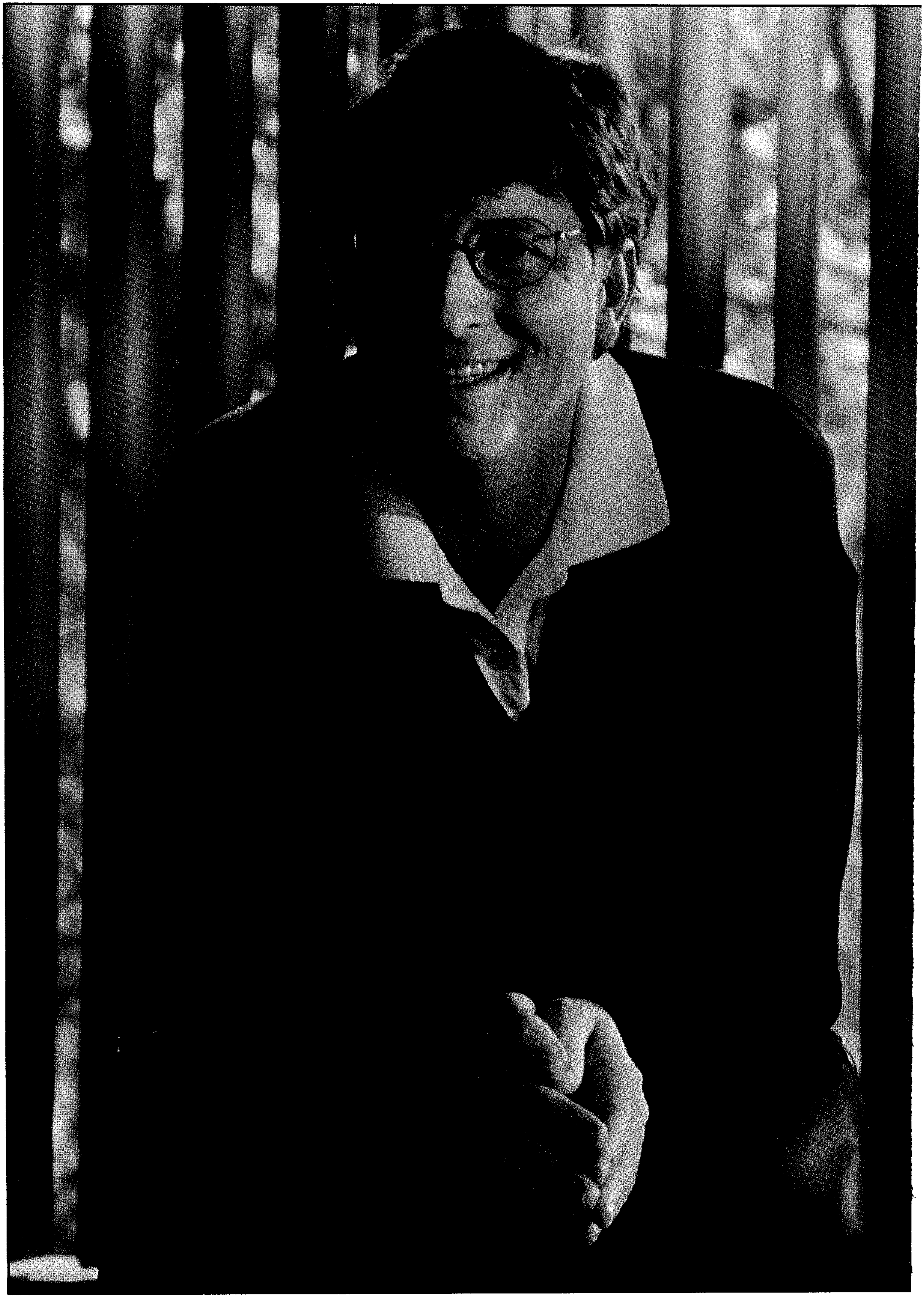

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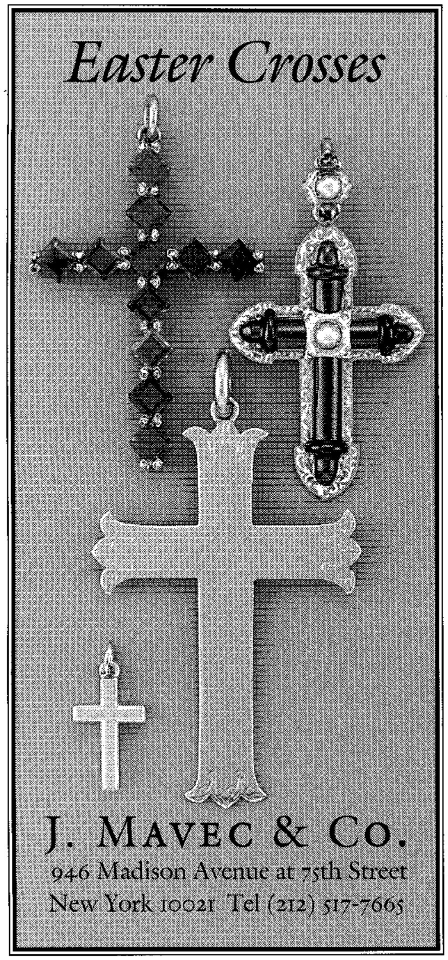
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and someone tries to reinvigorate it by asking, 'Did you see "Titanic"?' the whole conversation gets sucked into it. Imagine living in a town where everything is about movies—where there is no other conversation. That is a horror."

LYNTON'S decade at Disney was, among other things, an intensive seminar in the art of brand marketing. Before "synergy" became a corporate cliché, Eisner's Team Disney was slapping the Disney logo on movies, music, TV shows, theatrical productions, theme parks, clothes, silverware, and ocean cruises. By sticking to calculatedly wholesome images, Disney created, in effect, a Good Housekeeping seal of approval for mass entertainment.

Over lunch at Provence, a French bistro near Penguin's New York offices, Lynton expounds the potential megapower of the Penguin brand, illustrating his point with the story of Terry Waite, the Anglican clergyman who was held hostage in Beirut. "Six months into his captivity," Lynton says, "Waite made friends with his jailer, and, although they spoke different languages, he managed to tell the jailer he wanted a book. He drew an oval, and he drew a penguin, and he said, 'Find me a book that looks like this, and it will be a good book.' That story says everything about what Penguin stands for around the world."

What Disney means to mass entertainment, Lynton argues, Penguin can mean to a book-reading culture, worldwide. Using a strategy he calls "books plus," he is in the process of extending the Penguin brand into areas that, for the most part, have been off-limits to traditional book publishers. Last Christmas, while he was shopping for a good recording of Handel's "Messiah," he was overwhelmed by the number of choices available. What if there were a record label with a household name, he wondered, that would guarantee good value for money? The result is Penguin Classic CDs—a line of archival recordings that Penguin is producing with PolyGram. Album notes will be written by Penguin authors and other cultural luminaries. (Elvis Costello is a candidate to write the notes for the "Rite of Spring.") Next fall, the Penguin Playhouse plans to sponsor "Masterpiece Theatre"-like performances of Penguin Classics, to be sold to cable TV.

Lynton is after the world rights in English for more titles, so that they can be published simultaneously around the globe under the Penguin imprint instead of being sold to foreign publishers. Penguin also intends to publish books in their original languages. Its International Classics will include works like "Candide," in French, and "Faust," in German. Lynton hopes to boost Penguin's brand recognition in cyberspace as well, and is currently negotiating deals with online booksellers which give preference to Penguin titles.

Like Peter Mayer, he has expanded the kinds of books that carry the Penguin logo. He recently decided that Penguin Readers—condensed Penguin classics designed to help people learn English—should include commercial fiction. "The traditional Penguin assumption was that people should learn English by reading George Eliot," he says. "I walked in and said, 'Let's try it differently and use commercial novels, too.' Look, if you're in Poland and have just seen 'The Hunt for Red October,' I'm betting that you'd rather go out and buy the Tom Clancy Penguin Reader than the Dickens Reader."

Despite grim reports about the future of publishing, Lynton remains optimistic. "The business has fundamentally sound principles," he says. "It's going through a big change in distribution, and there may be some taste changes going on, but people are still buying books. There was a time when I thought CD-ROMs would drive us out of business, but that was before I had children. The fact is that when you're trying to get your daughter to go back to sleep at four in the morning you are not going to turn on a computer. No, you read her 'Good Night Moon' or 'The Little Engine That Could.'"

Suppressing a yawn, Lynton explains that his two daughters woke up at three-thirty that morning. He grabbed a book and read to them until he realized that he was the only one falling asleep.

"So what did you do then?" I ask.

Lynton looks sheepish and says, "I turned on the TV and let them watch the Cartoon Network."♦

INVESTIGATIONS

OPEN SEASON

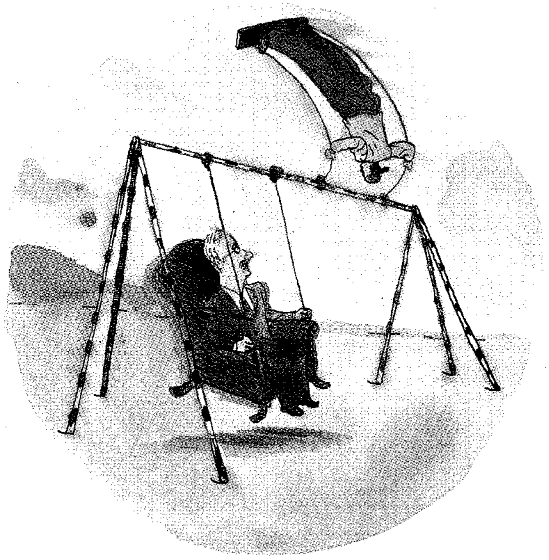
When do we lose our taste for the new?

BY ROBERT M. SAPOLSKY

Despite my best efforts to ignore him, Paul, my fresh-out-of-college administrative assistant, was getting on my nerves. The problem wasn't his work, which was superb. It was his taste in music. Shortly after his arrival at my neurobiology lab, his CD player started blasting something horrendous by whatever group twenty-year-olds were listening to. But that wasn't what bothered me. What bothered me was the way he kept switching what he listened to. One day it would be Sonic Youth for hours, and the next day late Beethoven. Irish folk music would give way to Gregorian chants, and then to Shostakovich, John Coltrane, big-band hits, Yma Sumac, Puccini arias, Philip Glass, and klezmer classics. He was spending the paychecks from his first real job on a methodical exploration of different types of music, giving them a careful listening, and forming opinions—hating some of the stuff, loving the process. What was irritating was how open-minded he was, how amenable to novelty.

He was like that in every respect. He had a beard and longish hair until, one day, he came into the lab with a bald pate. "I thought it would be interesting to try out this appearance for a while—see if it changes the way people interact with me," he explained. In his time off, he would spend a weekend at a film festival of Indian musicals, just for the experience. He'd pore over Melville, then Chaucer, then contemporary Hungarian realists.

All this was more than irritating. It was depressing, because it made me reflect on my own narrowing. At the age of forty, I listen to music constantly, but I can't remember the last time I listened to a new composer. And while I love all Mahler's music, I now seem to listen only to the same two symphonies of his. The same goes for reggae: it's always the same trusted tape of Bob Marley's greatest hits. And if I'm going out to dinner I'm more and more likely to order my usual favorites.



How did this happen? When did it become so important to have familiar ground underfoot?

BARRY BLITT

How did this happen? When did it become so important to have familiar ground underfoot? For many people, that question would lead to some heavy soul-searching. Being a scientist, I decided to avoid this by Studying the Subject. A quick survey revealed that this all too familiar tendency had been ignored in the scientific literature. Though there is research into why highly creative people tend to become less creative over time, no one knows why, as we age, we start buying those "Best of" anthologies advertised on late-night television. I figured I could at least get a better fix on the phenomenon, but I needed some data.

I wanted to test whether there were any clear-cut maturational time windows during which we form our cultural tastes, are open to new experience, even gravitate to it for its own

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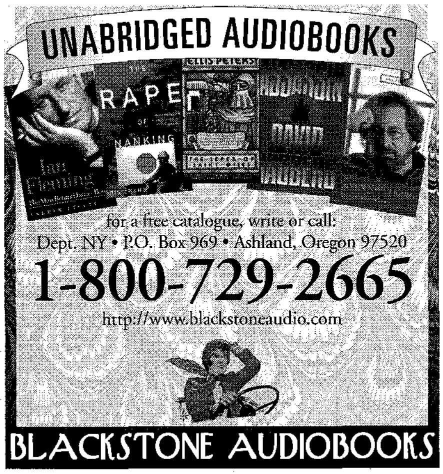

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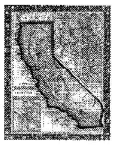

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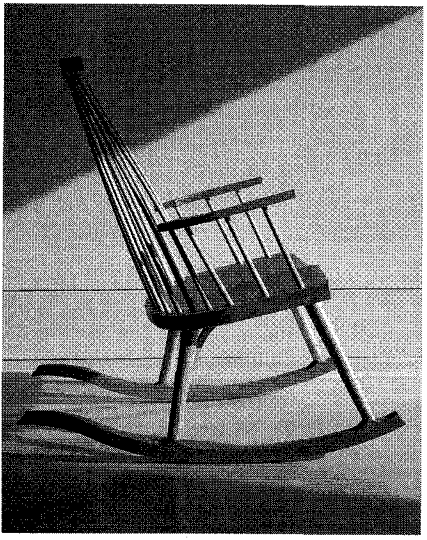

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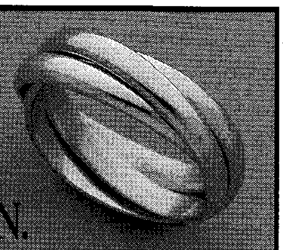

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PANTHER

When the panther came
no belfry rang alarms,
no cleric spat his tea.
When the panther came
the sky and lawn were still.
The panther came
through forest,
through field,
up to the wall
and my one blossoming cherry tree.

I had constructed
the world as it was
and had pared the body
from customs of languor.
It pressed its nose against
the pane and its gears
ground me away into ribbons
of dissonance.

It turned and sauntered
into the shadows. Its
paw marks on the earth
like cherries too ripe in a white bowl.

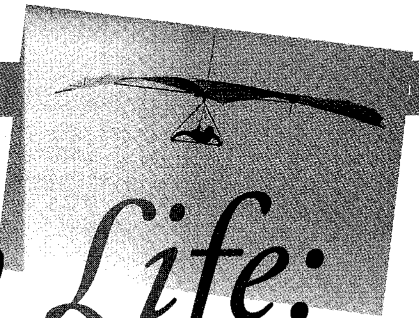
—NED O'GORMAN

sake. In particular, I wanted to determine whether there was a consistent age at which such windows of openness slammed shut.

As a CD of Wagner highlights played on ukulele boomed outside my office, I decided to try to figure out when we form our musical tastes, and when we stop being open to most new music. My research assistants and I called radio stations that specialize in the music of various periods: contemporary rock, the "Stairway to Heaven" seventies stations, the fifties doo-wop stations, and so on. In each case, we posed the same two questions to the station manager: When was most of the music that you play first introduced? And what is the average age of your listeners?

After more than forty phone calls around the country, a pattern became clear: not a lot of seventeen-year-olds were tuning in to the Andrews Sisters, not a lot of Rage Against the Machine was being played in retirement communities, and devotees of sixty nonstop minutes of James Taylor were starting to wear relaxed-fit jeans. This can be stated more precisely: Most people are twenty years old or younger when they first hear the popular music they choose to listen to for the rest of their lives. When we combined those results with a measure of how variable the data were, we figured out that if you are more than thirty-five years old when a style of popular music is introduced there's a greater than ninety-five per cent chance that you will never choose to listen to it. The window has closed.

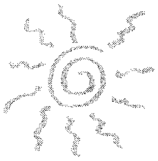
Next, I turned to the sensory realm of food. Psychologists have long studied gustatory novelty in laboratory animals, trying to understand how they choose their food, correct a dietary deficiency, or avoid a toxin. For wildlife zoologists, too, these issues have started to arise—particularly when, as a result of habitat degradation, an animal population is forced into a new ecosystem. The anthropologist Shirley Strum studied a troop of wild baboons in Kenya after a group of farmers forced them off their native grounds, and watched the animals learn what plants in their new home were good to eat. The laboratory and



The High Life:

Spring, Summer, and Fall in

The ALPS



They can be as challenging as the Matterhorn and the Zugspitze or as welcoming as an upland meadow at picnic time... as quaint as a half-timbered village or as cool as late-night jazz in a cellar club. For incomparable beauty and sheer variety—not to mention off-season value—the Alps in summer simply can't be topped.

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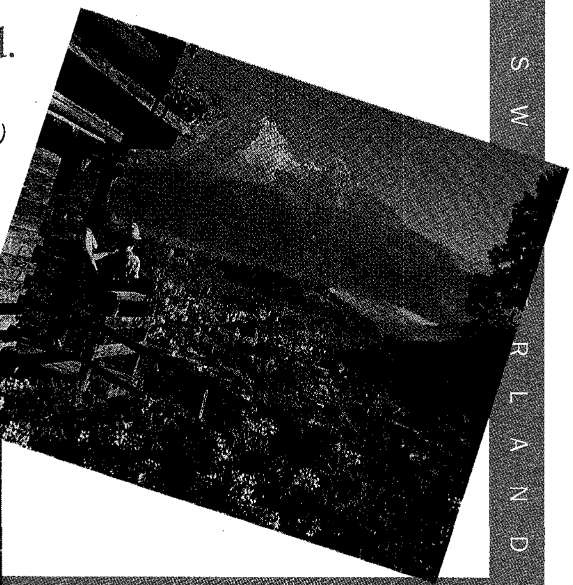

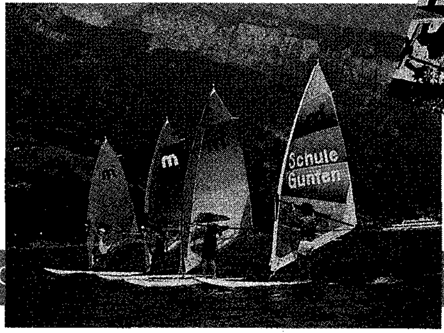

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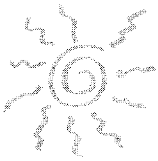
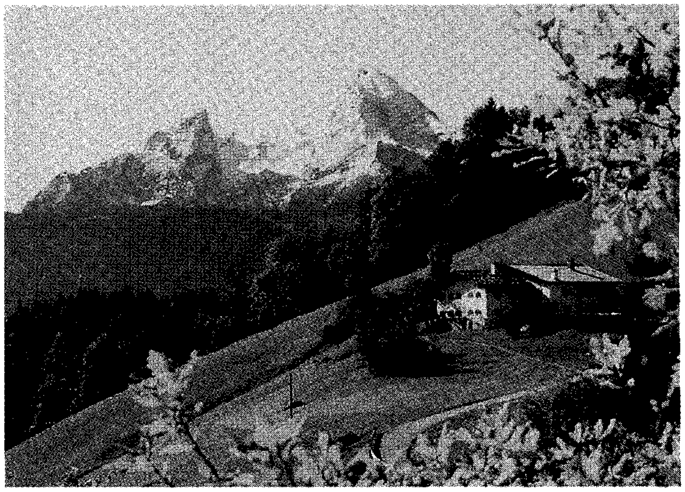
The Alpine countries of Austria, Germany, Italy and Switzerland, not only offer peak experiences for hiking and climbing enthusiasts. All summer, you'll revel in festivals and cultural events, museums and craft shops that showcase centuries-old skills, breathtaking driving, scenic trams to hop and, when you're ready to stop, the warmest hospitality anywhere in the world.



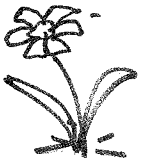
You'll encounter distinct cultures at every turn, yet cross borders almost as easily as you would a downtown street. For all their rich diversity, the countries of "The Greatest Outdoors" share the same love of life's real pleasures — good times, good food, good company.

On the Cultural Trail

The Alps are alive with the sound of music. In Switzerland, the Montreux Jazz Festival takes over its namesake city for the thirty-second year. Whether you 're into jazz or blues, rock or folk, Dylan or Marsalis, you'll know which way the wind blows July 3rd to the 18th. Another lakefront legend, Lucerne's International Music Festival, celebrates its 60th anniversary August 19th to September 20th, with symphony performances, outdoor serenades, lunch and late-night concerts.



Summertime, and the livin' is easy in Austria: the Bregenz Festival presents "Porgy and Bess" on a floating stage on Lake Constance from July 16th to August 20th. Off the music trail, a centennial tribute to Empress Elisabeth (1836-1898) takes place in the spa town of Bad Ischl near Salzburg, where a hiking track is named for that most athletic of regents. Near Innsbruck, visit the magical caves and theatrical halls of Swarovski Crystal World, viewing works by Keith Haring, Salvador Dali, and Nike de St. Phalle.



In Germany, the Bavarian resort of Garmisch-Partenkirchen holds the Richard Strauss Festival from June 17th to the 21st, a medley of opera, chamber music, gala symphonies and lieder recitals. On a more pastoral note, the mountain resort of Berchtesgaden brings the cows down from summer pastures on St. Michael's Day (September 29) in a festive parade through the streets. Munich, the Bavarian capital, lines up one festival after another. Try Munich International Film Festival, from June 27th to July

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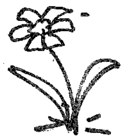
3rd, and the Tollwood Summer Festival, from June 24th to July 12th—a lively mix of action theater, dancing, and circus at the foot of Olympia Hill.

How about the symphonic, scenic and aerobic all in one fête? In northern Italy, the third annual "Sounds of the Dolomites" offers guided hikes to mountaintop concerts in July and August with some of Italy's leading classical musicians, vocalists, and jazz artists in native dress. Take part in hut-to-hut treks with strolling musicians, and hear Trentino mountain choirs perform on Saturdays.



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Aosta in northwest Italy, sometimes called the "Rome of the Alps" for its Roman architecture, offers recitals and concerts summer-long. The Aosta Valley boasts impressive fortified castles such as the fourteenth century Fenis, a marvel of turrets, dungeons and spiral staircases that thrills all ages.

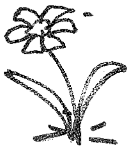
Cable Cars and Romantic Roads

In the Alps, getting around is half the fun. Public transit is a well-meshed network of trains, cog rail, cable cars, and lake steamers that often weave back and forth between countries.

For a window seat on Austria, hop on the leisurely Hahnenkamm train, a daily eight-hour run between Vienna and Innsbruck. Get off, see the sights, stay overnight in a Tyrolean village and hop back the next day. At Zell am Zee, visit the glacier Kitzsteinhorn for summer skiing.

True, you can set your watch by Swiss trains, but the service and scenery are equally impressive. On the William

Tell Express, your trip starts in Lucerne on a restored paddle steamer which crosses the lake in three-and-a-half hours, then switches to a sleek intercity train through the Gotthard Tunnel and into sunny Ticino lake country. Snow flakes swirl around the Glacier Express, a high-wire cross-country run from Zermatt to St. Moritz. The Bernina Express is a borderland beauty—a four-hour journey from Chur or St. Moritz through three cultures and over the Alps, past loop tunnels and wild gorges and down into Tirano in northern Italy.



Enjoy the beauty of Italy and Switzerland on the Domodossola Express from Lugano. The trolley-like train wanders through the Centovalli (Hundred Valleys) along the Italian border, rolling past steep chasms, deep green pools, and remote villages where locals play boccie in shaded parks near the tracks.

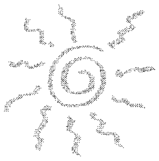
One of Italy's most spectacular drives is the Strada delle Dolomiti which links Bolzano with Cortina d'Ampezzo, winding through majestic cliffs and spires that change from beige to rust to rosy pink in the setting sun.

Germany's fine trains glide all over the Bavarian Alps, while the unforgettable Alpine Road beckons drivers. Use it to tour King Ludwig II's fantastic castles—the Neuschwanstein (inspiration for Disney's Fantasyland), Hohenschwangau, and Linderhof, Ludwig's homage to his idol, King Louis XIV. Near the Austrian border, the Alpine Road leads to Mittenwald, a lively town known for its rustic past, traditional costumes and violin-making. Mittenwald violins, first crafted 300 years ago, are still in production.

Biking, Hiking and Mile-High Fairways

For the adventurous, the Alps are the height. Hiking, cycling, climbing, ballooning, sailing, windsurfing, even glacier skiing can all be arranged, while golf, tennis and mountain walking are a way of life. Thanks to complex networks of well-posted trails, you can organize your own outing. Or join a guided hike, mountain ascent, or glacier crossing with the local tourist office or mountaineering shop.

In Switzerland, make new friends looped with a dozen others on a long red rope and zigzagging across the Grosser Aletschgletscher, Europe's longest glacier. It's all in a day's hike from the hamlet of Riederalp in the Valais region.



In northern Italy's Dolomites — refuge of chamois, roe deer and ptarmigan — hike to remote huts called "rifugi" for lunch.

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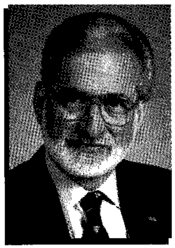

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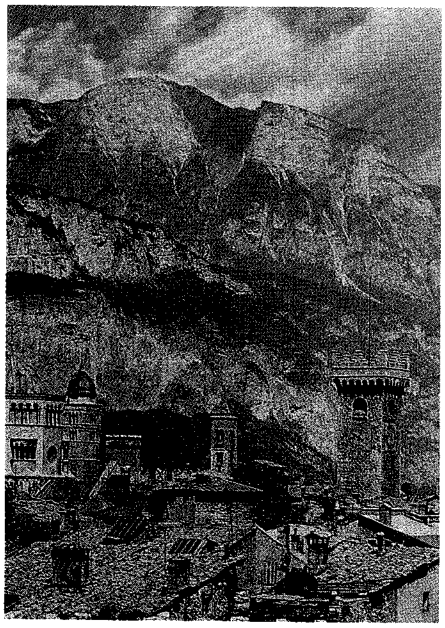
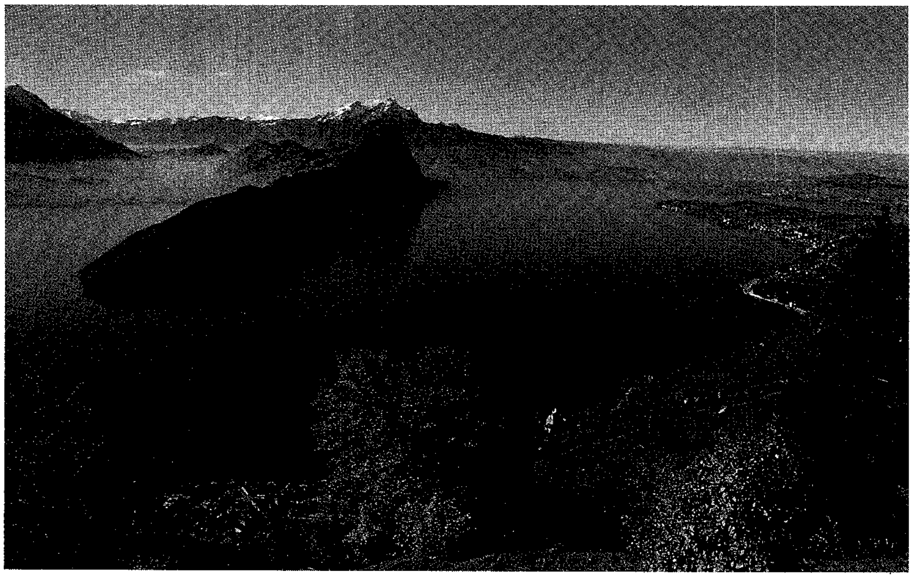
In July, when flowers blanket the Austrian resort of St. Anton, join easy hikes along the Alpine Rose Trail with local guide Ali Ilorngacher. At Innsbruck, choose from 40 hiking trails radiating from town, including an evening Lantern Walk. And in the Montafon Valley, the "Hikes on Historic Trails"program takes you over the paths of the migrating Rhaeto-Roman people. In Germany's Bavarian Alps, historic spas like Bad Reichenhall and Bad Toltz offer more than mud packs and massages: they are world-class sports resorts with natural brine springs and swimming pools, hiking and biking, golf packages and tennis tournaments.

Wine & Dine at a New Level

Whether you slip into a chic, lakeside supper club or stop for afternoon cake and coffee at a trailside hut, the quality of Alpine food and drink is always high.





In Austria you can live on *Griesnockerl* (soup with pasta), *Leberknödel* (soup with liver dumplings), *Gemüsesuppe* (thick vegetable soup), *Erbsensuppe* (pea soup). From these satisfying combinations you could easily move straight to dessert. Traditionally, that means *torten* (cakes). Recommended are the

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caramel-topped *Dobos-Torte* or the national cheesecake, *Topfentorte.*

In drink, Austria specializes in white wine. If you prefer dry, ask for resch or herb. On a hot day, try a glass with a splash of club soda, or as the Austrians say, "ein G'spritzter." And, of course, Austrian beer is unsurpassed.

In Germany, you'll find abundant dining for both the traditional, gourmet, and the calorie-conscious. Dishes can be hearty or light. Look out for *Weisswurst,* a fine veal sausage that's on virtually every menu, and *Leberkase,* a Bavarian meatloaf that's sliced thick and served with potatoes. And to drink? Germany's fine wines can be found throughout Bavaria, but beer is the libation of choice, served everywhere: in cellars, beer gardens, mountain huts and the finest restaurants. In Bavaria alone, there are 4,000

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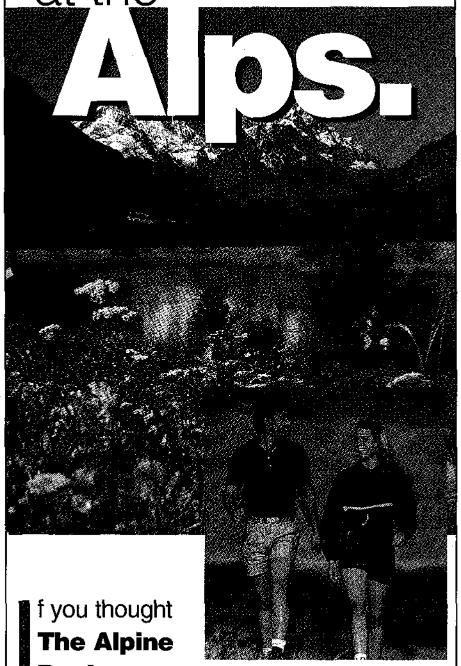

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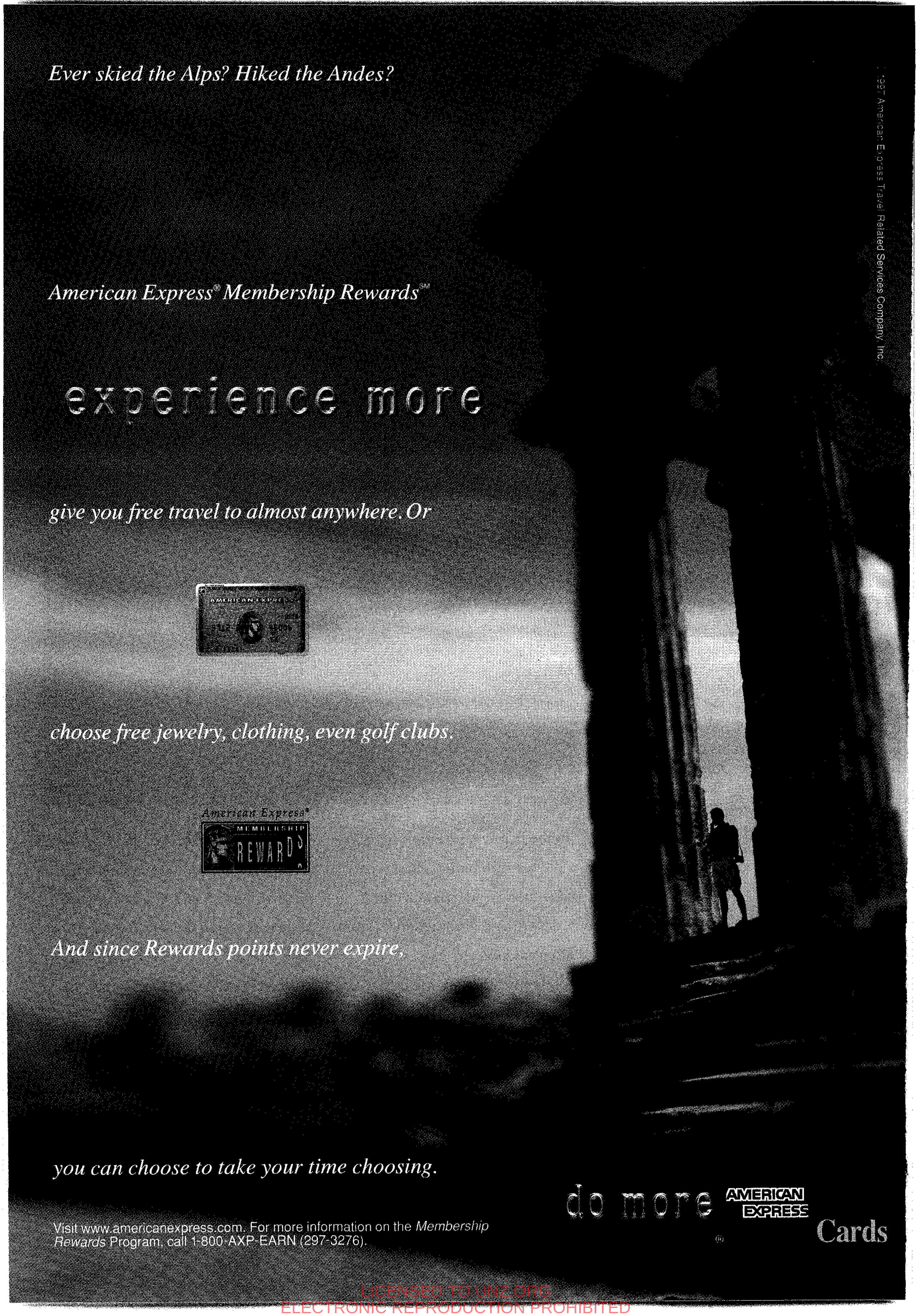
labels. West of Munich, Prince Luitpold presides over the medieval Kaltenberg Castle, an ancient purveyor of fine beer. Tour the royal residence's brewery and cellars; sample their delicious product while relaxing in the beer gardens and restaurants. Visit in July and watch the scene transform into a boisterous Medieval Jousting Tournament.

In the Italian Alps sample fresh pasta dressed with butter, *Parmigiano Reggiano* cheese, and shaved truffle. Jams, desserts and flavorings made from the succulent local apples, pears and wild berries are outstanding. In Lombardy's Valtellina region, try *pizzoccheri* (buckwheat pasta) with cabbage, potatoes, garlic, and bitto cheese. Other favorites include local game, cheeses, and excellent red wines. Along the Austrian border, Alto Adige (or *Südtirol*) has a unique cuisine that combines a Germanic base with Italian flavor: breads flecked with poppy or caraway, smoked prosciutto, known as *speck*, and *canederli dumplings*.

Swiss food reflects its many cultures and shifting terrain. Nearly every valley has its own specialty. In lowland Ticino lake country, the local plate is *polenta*; in the higher Graubunden area, it is *bundnerteller*—beef dried in the mountain air. To the west in Valais, the same dish is called *assiette Valaisanne*. Creamy fondues and *raclettes* are popular here too. And don't miss *Rösti*, Swiss hash browns. They're such a national hit that a Lake Geneva restaurant, the Isenau in Les Diablerets, hosts a five-week *Rösti* festival July 18th to Aug. 22nd.

And at breakfast there is soul-satisfying *Muesli* cereal, a Swiss original. What better way to start a day in the Greatest Outdoors?



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NICK DOWNES

"On the other hand, he never takes a sick day."

• •

the field studies show the same thing: animals normally shy away from novel foods, and when they finally do get hungry enough to try something new the youngsters are the ones most given to exploration: they're most likely to make a discovery, and most open to changing their behavior when they see that someone else has.

Does the pattern apply to us? To pursue the time-window strategy I used with the radio stations, I needed a type of food that, by Middle American standards, was truly anomalous and that had been introduced during a recent, identifiable time. I thought about pizza or bagels, but both had been too pervasive for too long. There was the shift in Chinese-restaurant food from chop-suey Cantonese to spicy Szechuan, but it was hard to identify any clear transition point.

Sushi worked. Little pieces of raw fish served with horseradish and bits of vegetable carved to look like flowers: here was something that probably remains a bit off-putting to the pot-roast crowd living near the amber waves of grain. Returning to our phones, my research assistants and I called sushi restaurants throughout the Midwest: from Omaha, Nebraska on down to Eden Prairie, Minnesota. When was sushi first introduced into your town? How old is your average non-Asian customer?

In a number of instances, the news that some neurobiology professor wanted information for a survey generated consternation. We also stumbled on what was apparently a nasty feud in Bloomington, Indiana, over which of two sushi places had opened first. But fifty restaurants later we had uncovered a fairly clear pattern. The typical non-Asian Midwestern sushi patron had been less than twenty-eight years old when sushi first arrived in town, and among townspeople who were older than thirty-nine at that time the odds were greater than ninety-five per cent that they would never touch it. Another window closed.

Emboldened further, I looked into one more window. I live near the Haight district in San Francisco, and thanks to this proximity I was dimly aware that what is currently outrageous in fashion has changed since my peers and I were affronting our elders by wearing jeans to high school. Here, surely, was another realm amenable to the time-window approach. Tattoos wouldn't fill the bill, because they have been around for a long while and because their connotations have shifted. Pierced ears for men don't work, either, and for much the same reason: sixty-year-old Republican assemblymen can get away with earrings these days. Soon I had entered the world of tongue studs and navel and genital rings. Retreating to my office, I let my research assistants handle all those phone calls on their own: When did you first start offering this type of body piercing in your town? How old is your average customer?

At these establishments, the news that a neurobiologist wanted information prompted not one raised eyebrow, pierced or otherwise. Thirty-five data points later, we had a remarkably clear answer. The average tongue-stud wearer was eighteen or younger when that sociopolitical deconstructionist fashion statement, or whatever it is, arrived on the scene. And if you were older than twenty-three at the time, the odds are ninety-five per cent that you have passed up tongue studs altogether, probably just trying instead to get a hairdo like Jennifer Aniston's.

NOW we had some major scientific discoveries on our hands: for at least one particular fashion novelty, the window of receptivity essentially closed by age twenty-three; for popular music, it closed by thirty-five; for an alien food type, by thirty-nine. These findings seemed reminiscent of work that had been done regarding creativity, where, in study after study, age has emerged as a leading factor. The profession of mathematics, for instance, is built almost entirely upon the creative breakthroughs of wunderkinder, and studies of other creative professions show a less extreme version of the same pattern. Count the number of melodies per year from a composer, poems from a poet, original research findings from a scientist, and, on the average, you'll find a decline after a certain, relatively youthful peak.

These studies also indicate that over time the great creative minds not only are less likely to generate something new but are less open to someone else's novelty—the same phenomenon I was seeing in the sushi bars. Think of Einstein, in his later years, fighting a rear-guard action against quantum mechanics, or of Alfred Mirsky as the last major figure in cell biology to reject the idea that DNA was the molecule of heredity. As the physicist Max Planck once observed, established generations of scientists never accept new theories; they die first. In some cases, the closing mind of a former revolutionary rejects what should have been the logical extension of his revolution. Consider Martin Luther, who spent his final years helping to crush the peasant uprisings galvanized by his own youthful work. There's a consistent trend emerging here. As we age, all of us—the senior scientist flailing against his errant disciples, the commuter twiddling with the radio dial for a familiar tune—become less open to someone else's novelty.

What can this be about? The psychologist Dean Keith Simonton has shown that the decline in creativity and openness among great minds isn't predicted by age so much as by how long people have worked in one discipline. Scholars who switch disciplines seem to have their openness rejuvenated. What matters most isn't chronological age but "disciplinary" age.

There are a number of ways you might try to account for this effect. Maybe it's that the same old stodgy tricks seem fresh and original in the new discipline. Maybe it's that an aging individual who is a high achiever in one discipline and switches to another is unusually open to novelty in the first place. Or maybe changing disciplines truly does stimulate the mind to regain some of its youthful openness to novelty; as the neuroscientist Marian Diamond has shown, environmental stimulation can make more elaborate neuronal connections in the adult brain. An alternative explanation finds support in Simonton's recent work. Novel discoveries in a field are, pretty much by definition, the ones that overturn the entrenched ideas of the intellectual élites. The reason that these gray eminences become reactionary, then, is simply that they have the most to lose in the face of novelty.

But I don't think any of this tells us much about the narrowing of taste. When it comes to picking a radio station for the drive home, our investment in the status quo isn't what's preventing us from listening to music popular with kids twenty years younger than we are. And the eminence idea doesn't tell us much about why old animals are unwilling to try new foods.

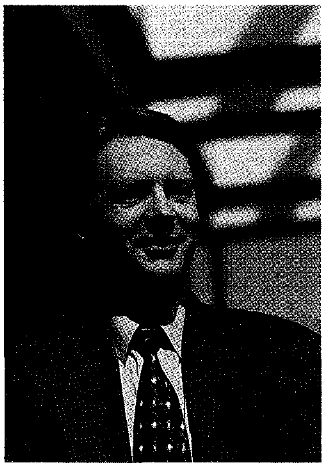
You might think that the explanation was neurological—that some novelty center in our brain starts to atrophy with age, losing neurons left and right. In fact, though, in most brain regions there isn't any dramatic neuron loss as we get older. With extreme age, there is a loss of connections between neurons, causing neuronal networks of communication to weaken. That probably has something to do with why it's more difficult for us to absorb new information and apply it in a novel way as we age, while our ability to recall facts and apply them in the habitual way remains intact. But it doesn't explain the declining *appeal* of novelty: I don't think most folks holding out for a good, thick steak do so because they have trouble understanding the raw-fish paradigm of sushi. The real problem with the neurological approach, however, is that there is no such thing as a novelty center in the brain, let alone sub-areas for fashion, music, or food which age at different speeds.

Maybe getting a grip on the phenomenon requires shifting the emphasis. In Tracy Kidder's "Old Friends," a nursing-home resident says about his forgetful roommate, "Heard only twice, Lou's memories could seem monotonous. Heard many times, they were like old friends. They were comforting." I've been asking why, as we get older, novelty becomes unappealing. Maybe we need to try to understand why repetition becomes appealing. There's a stage of childhood in which kids become mad for repetition, taking pleasure in the realization that they are mastering rules. Maybe the pleasure at the other end of life is the realization that the rules are still there—as are we. Given that aging contracts our neural networks and makes our cognition more repetitive, it would be a humane quirk of evolution if we were reassured by that repetition. As Igor Stravinsky lay dying, he repeatedly banged his ring against the metal railing of his hospital bed, startling his wife each time. Finally, with a touch of irritation, she asked why he was doing that, since he knew she was still there. "But I want to be sure that *I* still exist," he replied.

Why, really, does it matter whether people are open to novelty in their cultural and social choices? Does society really need more eighty-year-olds with tongue studs eating raw eel? Is it a crime if I keep listening to that Bob Marley tape? There may even be some advantage for social groups if their aging members become protective archivists of their cultural inheritance, instead of constantly jettisoning the old in order to soak up the new. The physiologist Jared Diamond has argued that part of the success of Cro-Magnons was that they lived about fifty per cent longer than Neanderthals did, and so when some rare ecological catastrophe hit there was a substantially greater chance that someone would be old enough to remember the last time that it happened and how they got out of the mess then. (Perhaps, in my old age, if there's a locust infestation that devastates food stores at my university I'll be able to save the youngsters by my recollections of which wild plants behind the Student Union are safe to eat, along with an ancillary lecture about how reggae isn't what it used to be.)

But as I hang up the lab coat and actually reflect on some of this, I find it a little dispiriting. When I see the finest of my students ready to run off to the Peace Corps and minister to lepers in the Congo—or teach some kid in the barrio just outside the university how to read—I remember that, once, it was easier to be that way. An open mind is a prerequisite to an open heart. And then there's simply the impoverishment that comes with this closing of the mind to novelty and glorying in repetition, as years of cultural exploration are likely to give way to banging on a hospital-bed railing. What a shock to discover that at the age of forty you've already been dipped in bronze and placed on a mantelpiece—that there are already societal institutions like oldies radio stations, whose very existence affirms the fact that you are no longer where culture is. If (as my administrative assistant assures me) there's a rich, vibrant world out there, it shouldn't be just for twenty-year-olds to explore for exploration's sake. Whatever it is that fends us off from novelty, I figure maybe it's worth putting up a bit of a fight, even if it means forgoing Bob Marley's greatest hits every now and then. ♦

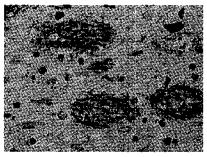
He's working to help Alzheimer's patients remember, and that's helping families hope.



Axel Unterbeck
pharmaceutical company researcher

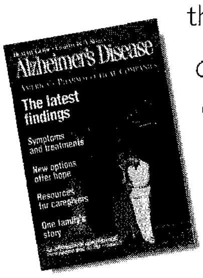
"When I was a young student, people used to think that memory loss and dementia were a normal part of aging. Today we know that in many cases, the real cause is Alzheimer's disease. As a pharmaceutical company researcher, I am committed to finding ways of treating this disease."

"Currently, there are about 4 million people in the United States with Alzheimer's disease. Unfortunately, this number will dramatically increase as our population ages. My company is searching for treatments that might slow down, halt or maybe even reverse the progression of Alzheimer's."



Brain cells from an Alzheimer's patient.

"We think Alzheimer's disease has several different causes," says Axel Unterbeck, a pharmaceutical company researcher. "Some forms are genetic while others might involve additional factors. Because it affects memory and learning, it's one of the most complex diseases we know of." Unterbeck and his team of researchers are working on genes that are linked to Alzheimer's disease. "Four genes have been identified so far," Unterbeck says. "These gene discoveries give us, for the first time, a realistic hope to find a cure."



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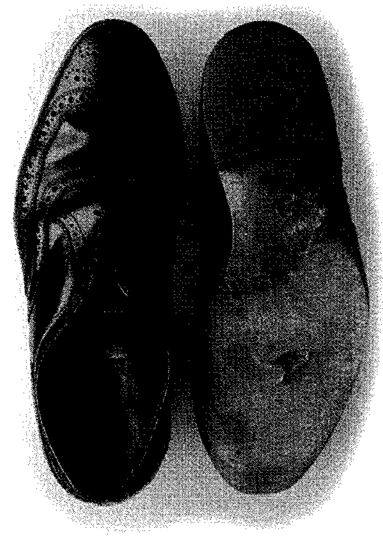

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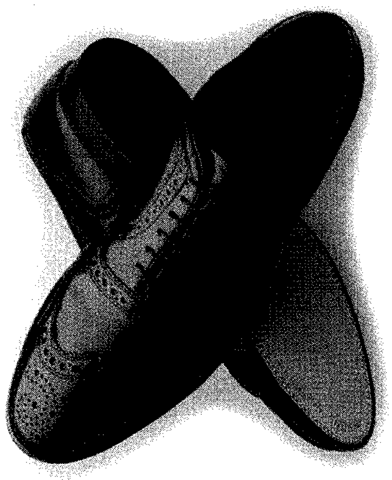

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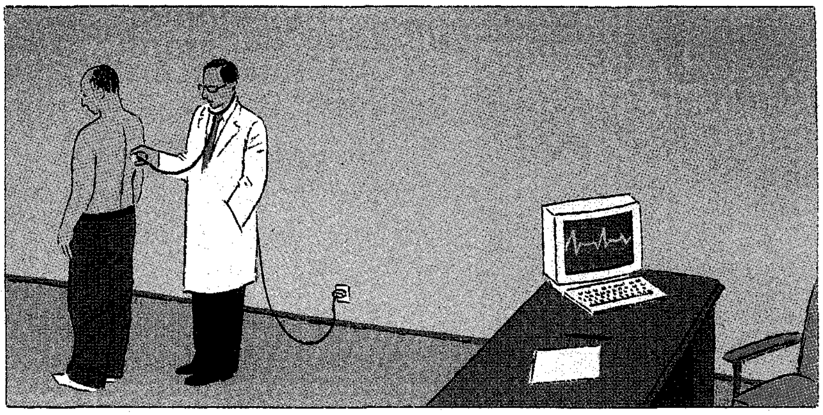
BY ATUL GAWANDE



GUY BILLOUT

ONE summer day two years ago, Hans Ohlin, the fifty-year-old chief of coronary care at the University of Lund Hospital, in Sweden, sat down in his office with a stack of two thousand two hundred and forty electrocardiograms. Each test result consisted of a series of wavy lines, running from left to right on a letter-size page of graph paper. Ohlin read them alone in his office so that he would not be disturbed. He scanned them swiftly but carefully, one at a time, separating them into two piles according to whether or not he thought that the patient was having a heart attack at the time the electrocardiogram (EKG) was recorded. To avoid fatigue and inattention, he did his work over the course of a week, sorting through the EKGs in shifts no longer than two hours, and taking long breaks. He wanted no careless errors; the stakes were too high. This was the medical world's version of the Deep Blue chess match, and Ohlin was cardiology's Gary Kasparov. He was going head to head with a computer.

The EKG is one of the most common of diagnostic tests, performed more than fifty million times a year in the United States alone. Electrodes are placed on the skin to pick up the low-voltage electrical impulses that, with each beat, travel through the heart muscle, and those impulses are reflected in the waves on an EKG printout. The theory behind an EKG is that in a heart attack a portion of the muscle dies, causing the electrical impulses to change course when they travel around the dead tissue. As a result, the waves on the printout change, too. Sometimes those changes are obvious; more often they are subtle—or, in medical argot, "non-specific."

To medical students, EKGs seem unmanageably complex at first. Typically, an EKG uses twelve leads, and each one produces a different-looking tracing on the printout. Yet students are taught to discern in these tracings a dozen or more features, each of which is given an alphabetical label: for instance, there's the downstroke at the start of a beat (the Q wave), the upstroke at the peak of heart contraction (the R wave), the subsequent downstroke (the S wave), and the rounded wave right after the beat (the T wave). Sometimes small changes here and there add up to a heart attack; sometimes they don't. When I was a medical student, I first learned to decode the EKG as if it were a complex calculation. My classmates and I would carry laminated cards in our white lab-coat pockets with a list of arcane instructions: calculate the heart rate and the axis of electrical flow, check for a

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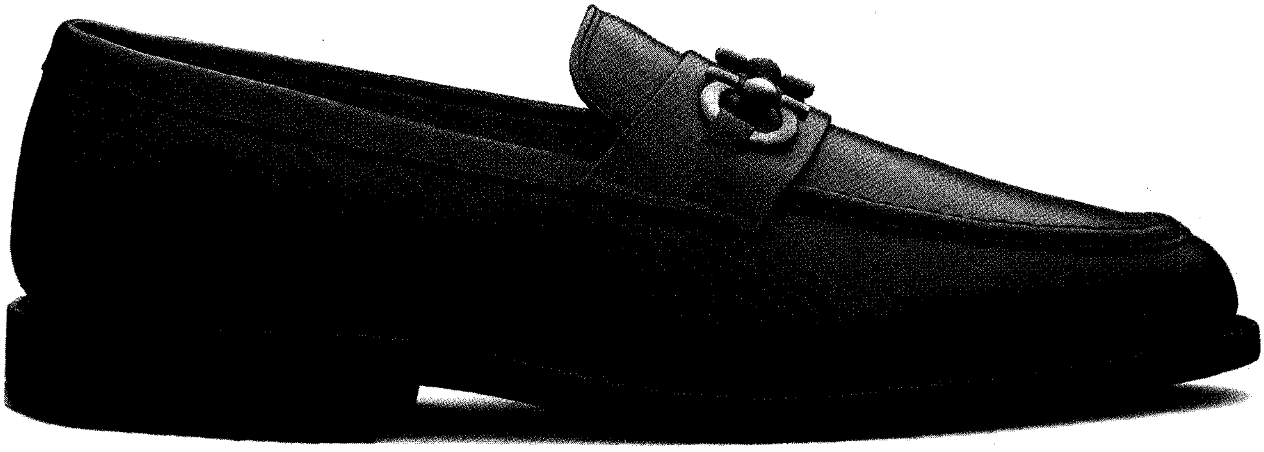

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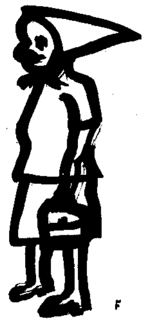
rhythm disturbance, then check for an ST-segment elevation greater than one millimetre in leads V1 to V4, or for poor R-wave progression (signifying one type of heart attack), and so on.

With experience, it gets easier to manage all this information. An experienced cardiologist can sometimes make out a heart attack at a glance, the way a child can recognize his mother across a room. But at bottom the test remains stubbornly opaque. Studies have shown that between two and eight per cent of patients with heart attacks who are seen in emergency rooms are mistakenly discharged, and a quarter of these people die or suffer a complete cardiac arrest. Even if such patients aren't mistakenly sent home, crucial treatment may be delayed when an EKG is misread. Human judgment, even expert human judgment, falls well short of certainty. The rationale for trying to teach a computer to read an EKG, therefore, is fairly compelling. If the result should prove to be even a slight improvement on human performance, thousands of lives could be saved each year.

The first suggestion that a computer could do better came in 1990, in an influential article published by William Baxt, then an emergency physician at the University of California at San Diego. Baxt described how an "artificial neural network"—a kind of computer architecture—could make sophisticated clinical decisions. Such expert systems learn from experience, improving their guesses by incorporating feedback from each success and each failure. In a later study, Baxt showed that a computer could handily outperform a group of doctors in diagnosing heart attacks among patients with chest pain. But two-thirds of the physicians in his study were inexperienced residents, whom you'd expect to have difficulties with EKGs. Could a computer outperform an experienced specialist?



This question was what the Swedish study was trying to answer. The study was led by Lars Edenbrandt, a medical colleague of Ohlin's and an expert in artificial intelligence. Edenbrandt spent five years perfecting his system, first in Scotland and then in Sweden. He fed his computer EKGs from more than ten thousand patients, telling it which ones represented heart attacks and which ones did not, until the machine grew expert at reading even the most equivocal of EKGs. Then he approached Ohlin, one of the top cardiologists in Sweden and a man who ordinarily read as many as ten thousand EKGs a year. Edenbrandt selected two thousand two hundred and forty EKGs from the hospital files, of which exactly half, eleven hundred and twenty, were confirmed to show heart attacks. With little fanfare, the results were published this past fall. Ohlin picked up six hundred and twenty. The computer picked up seven hundred and thirty-eight. Machine beat man by twenty per cent.

WESTERN medicine is dominated by a single imperative—the quest for machine-like perfection in the delivery of care. From the first day of medical training, it is clear that errors are unacceptable. Taking time to bond with patients is fine, but every X-ray must be tracked down and every drug dose must be exactly right. No allergy or previous medical problem can be forgotten, no diagnosis missed. In the operating room, no movement, no time, no drop of blood can be wasted.

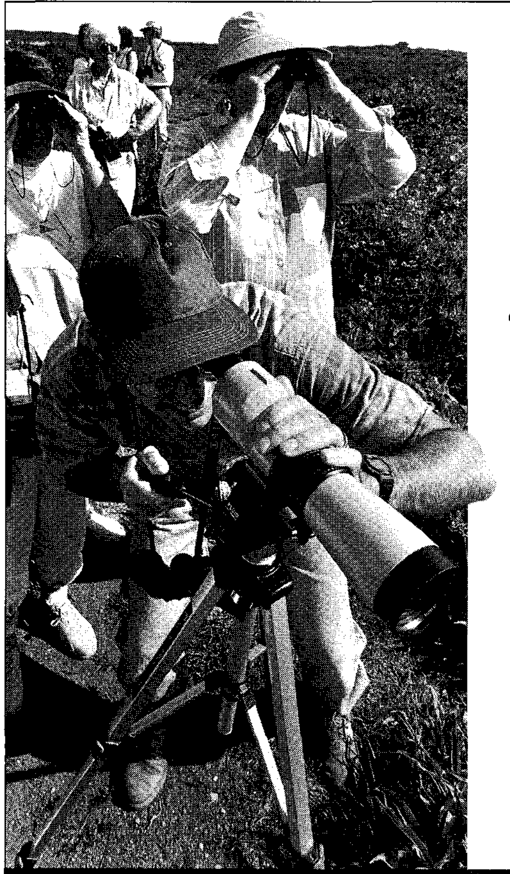
The keys to this kind of perfection are routinization and repetition: survival rates after heart surgery, vascular surgery, and other operations are directly related to the number of procedures the surgeon has performed. Twenty-five years ago, general surgeons performed hysterectomies, removed lung cancers, and bypassed hardened leg arteries. Today, each condition has its specialists, who perform one narrow set of procedures over and over again. When I'm in the operating room, the highest praise I can get from my fellow-surgeons is "You're a machine, Gawande." And the use of "machine" is more than casual: human beings, under some circumstances, really can act like machines.

Consider a relatively simple surgical procedure, hernia repair, which I learned to do as a first-year surgical resident. A hernia is a weakening in the abdominal wall, usually in the groin, that allows the abdomen's contents to bulge through. In most hospitals, fixing it—pushing the bulge back in and repairing the abdominal wall—takes about ninety minutes and might cost upward of four thousand dollars. In anywhere from ten to fifteen per cent of the cases, the operation eventually fails and the hernia returns. There is, however, a small medical center outside Toronto, known as the Shouldice Hospital, where none of these statistics apply. At Shouldice, hernia operations often take from thirty to forty-five minutes. Their recurrence rate is an astonishing one per cent. And the cost of an operation is about half of what it is elsewhere. There's probably no better place in the world to get a hernia repaired.

What's the secret of that clinic's success? The short answer is that the dozen surgeons at Shouldice do hernia operations and nothing else. Each surgeon repairs between six hundred and eight hundred hernias a year—more than most general surgeons do in a lifetime. In this particular field, Shouldice's staff is obviously better trained and has more experience than anyone else. But there's another way to formulate the reason for its success, which is that all the repetition changes the way they think. As Lucian Leape, a Harvard pediatric surgeon who has made a study of medical error, told me, "a defining trait of experts is that they move more and more problem-solving into an automatic mode." A lot of mental functioning is automatic and effortless, as when you drive a car to work. Novel situations, however, require conscious thought and "workaround" solutions, which are slower to develop, more difficult to execute, and more prone to error. A surgeon who can deal with nonstandard situations in an automatic mode has a significant advantage. If the Swedish EKG study argues that there are situations in which machines should replace physicians, the Shouldice example suggests that physicians should be trained to act more like machines.

On a chilly Monday morning not long ago, I put on a green cotton scrub top and pants, a disposable mask, and a paper cap, and wandered among cases in the Shouldice Hospital's five operating rooms. To describe one case is to describe them all: I watched three surgeons operate on six patients, and none deviated even a step from their standard protocol.

In a tiled, box-like operating room, I peered over the shoulder of Richard Sang, a fifty-one-year-old surgeon with a dry wit and a youthful appearance. Though we chatted during the entire operation, Dr. Sang performed each step in the operation without pause, almost absently, with the assistant knowing precisely which tissues to retract, and the nurse handing over exactly the right instruments; instructions were completely unnecessary. The patient, a pleasant, surprisingly composed man of about thirty-five, who occasionally piped up from under the drapes to ask how things were going, lay on the table with his lower abdomen exposed and painted yellow with a bactericidal iodine solution. A plum-size bulge was visible to the left side of the hard bone of the pubis. Dr. Sang injected the skin with a local anesthetic in a diagonal line from the top of the man's left hip to the pubis, along the crease of the groin. With a No. 10 blade, he made a four-inch slash along this line in a single



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downstroke, revealing yellow glistening fat below. The assistant laid a cloth along each side of the wound to absorb the mild bleeding, and pulled it open.

Sang swiftly cut down through the outer muscle layer of the abdominal wall, exposing the spermatic cord, a half-inch cable of blood and spermatic vessels. The patient's bulge, we could now see, came through a weakness in the muscle wall beneath the cord, which is a common site. Sang slowed down for a moment, checking meticulously for another hernia, along the area where the cord came through the inner abdominal wall. Sure enough, he found a small, second hernia there—one that, if it had been missed, would almost certainly have caused a recurrence. He then sliced open the remaining muscle layers beneath the cord, so that the abdominal wall was completely open, and pushed the bulging abdominal contents back inside. If you have a tear in a couch cushion with stuffing coming through it, you can put a patch on the cushion or you can sew it back together. At my hospital, we usually push the hernias back in, place a piece of sturdy plastic-like mesh on top, and sew it to the surrounding tissue. It provides a reliable reinforcement, and the technique is easy to perform. But Sang, like the other Shouldice surgeons I asked, scoffed at the idea: they viewed the mesh as a hazard for infection (since it's a foreign body), expensive (since the mesh can cost hundreds of dollars), and unnecessary (since they get enviable results without it).

As Sang and I talked about such alternatives, he sewed the wall back together in three separate muscle layers, using fine wire, making sure that the edge of each layer overlapped like a double-breasted suit. After Sang closed the patient's skin with small clips and removed the drapes, the patient swung his legs over the edge of the table, stood up, and walked out of the room. The procedure had taken just half an hour.

Many surgeons elsewhere use Shouldice's distinctive repair method but obtain ordinary rates of recurrence. It's not the technique alone that makes Shouldice great. The doctors at Shouldice deliver hernia repairs the way Intel makes chips: they like to call themselves a focussed factory. Even the hospital building is specially designed for

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NATIONAL POETRY MONTH
APRIL 1998

A little Madness
in the Spring
Is wholesome
even for the King

—Emily Dickinson

From *The Poems of Emily Dickinson.*
Thomas H. Johnson, Ed., Cambridge, Mass.:
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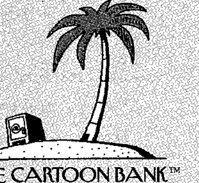

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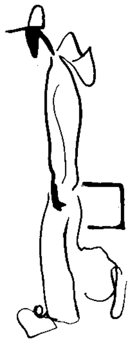
hernia patients. Their rooms have no phones or televisions, and their meals are served in a downstairs dining hall; as a result, the patients have no choice but to get up and walk around, thereby preventing complications associated with inactivity, such as pneumonia or leg clots.

After Sang left the patient with a nurse, he found the next patient and walked him straight back into the same operating room. Hardly three minutes had passed, but the room was already clean. Fresh sheets and new instruments were already laid out. And so the next case began. I asked Byrnes Shouldice, a son of the clinic's founder and a hernia surgeon himself, whether he ever got bored doing hernias all day long. “No,” he said. “Perfection is the excitement.”



Paradoxically, this kind of superspecialization raises the question of whether the best medical care requires fully trained doctors. None of the three surgeons I watched operate at the Shouldice Hospital would even have been in a position to conduct their own procedures in a typical American hospital, for none had completed general-surgery training. Sang was a former family physician; Byrnes Shouldice had come straight from medical school; and the surgeon-in-chief was an obstetrician. Yet after apprenticing for a year or so they were the best hernia surgeons in the world. If you're going to do nothing but fix hernias or perform colonoscopies, do you really need the complete specialists' training (four years of medical school, five or more years of residency) in order to excel? Depending on the area of specialization, do you—and this is the question posed by the Swedish EKG study—even have to be human?

ALTHOUGH the medical establishment has started to recognize that some form of automation can produce the best results in medical treatment, it has been reluctant to apply the same insight to the area of medical diagnosis. Most physicians remain convinced that diagnosis can't be reduced to a set of generalizations—that it must instead take account of the idiosyncrasies of individual patients.

It only stands to reason, doesn't it? When I am the surgical consultant in the emergency department, I'm often asked to assess whether a patient with abdominal pain has appendicitis. I listen closely to his story and consider a multitude of factors: how his abdomen feels to me, the pain's quality and location, his temperature, his appetite, the laboratory results. But I don't plug it all into a formula and calculate the result. I use my clinical judgment—my intuition—to decide whether he should undergo surgery, be kept in the hospital for observation, or be sent home. We've all heard about individuals who defy the statistics—the hardened criminal who goes straight, the “terminal” cancer patient who miraculously recovers. In psychology, there's something called the broken-leg problem. A statistical formula may be highly successful in predicting whether or not a person will go to a movie in the next week. But someone who knows that this person is laid up with a broken leg will beat the formula. And no formula can take into account the infinite range of such exceptional events. That's why doctors are convinced that they'd better stick with their well-honed instincts when they're making a diagnosis.

Recently, I saw a thirty-nine-year-old woman with pain in the right-lower abdomen who did not fit the pattern for appendicitis. She said that she was fairly comfortable and she had no fever or nausea. Indeed, she was hungry, and she did not jump when I examined her abdomen. Her test results were largely equivocal. But I still recommended appendectomy to the attending surgeon. Her white-blood-cell count was high, suggesting infection, and, moreover, she just *looked* sick to me. Sick patients can have a certain unmistakable appearance you come to recognize after a while in residency. You may not know exactly what is going on, but you're sure it's something serious. The attending physician accepted my diagnosis, operated, and found appendicitis.

This past winter, I had a sixty-five-year-old patient with almost precisely the same story. The lab findings were the same; I also got an abdominal scan, but it was inconclusive. Here, too, the patient didn't fit the pattern for appendicitis; here, too, he just looked to me as

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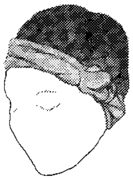

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if he had it. In surgery, however, the appendix turned out to be normal. He had diverticulitis, a colon infection that usually doesn't require an operation.

Is the second case more typical than the first? How often does my intuition lead me astray? The radical implication of the Swedish study is that the individualized, intuitive approach that lies at the center of modern medicine is flawed—that our attempt to acknowledge human complexity causes more mistakes than it prevents. There's ample support for this conclusion from studies outside medicine. Over the past four decades, cognitive psychologists have shown repeatedly that a blind algorithmic approach usually trumps human judgment in making predictions and diagnoses. The psychologist Paul Meehl, in his classic 1954 treatise, "Clinical Versus Statistical Prediction," described a study of Illinois parolees which compared estimates given by prison psychiatrists that a convict would violate parole with estimates derived from a rudimentary formula that weighed such factors as age, number of previous offenses, and type of crime. Despite the formula's crudeness, it predicted the occurrence of parole violations far more accurately than the psychiatrists did. In recent articles, Meehl and the social scientists David Faust and Robyn Dawes have reviewed more than a hundred studies comparing computers or statistical formulas with human judgment in predicting everything from the likelihood that a company will go bankrupt to the life expectancy of liver-disease patients. In virtually all cases, statistical thinking equalled or surpassed human judgment. You might think that a human being and a computer working together would make the best decisions. But, as the researchers point out, this claim makes little sense. If opinions agree, no matter. If they disagree, the studies show that you're better off sticking with the computer's judgment.

What accounts for the superiority of a well-developed computer algorithm? First, Dawes notes, human beings are inconsistent: we are easily influenced by suggestion, the order in which we see things, recent experience, distractions, and the way information is framed. Second, human beings are not good at considering multiple factors. We give some variables too much weight and wrongly ignore others. A good computer program consistently and automatically gives each factor its

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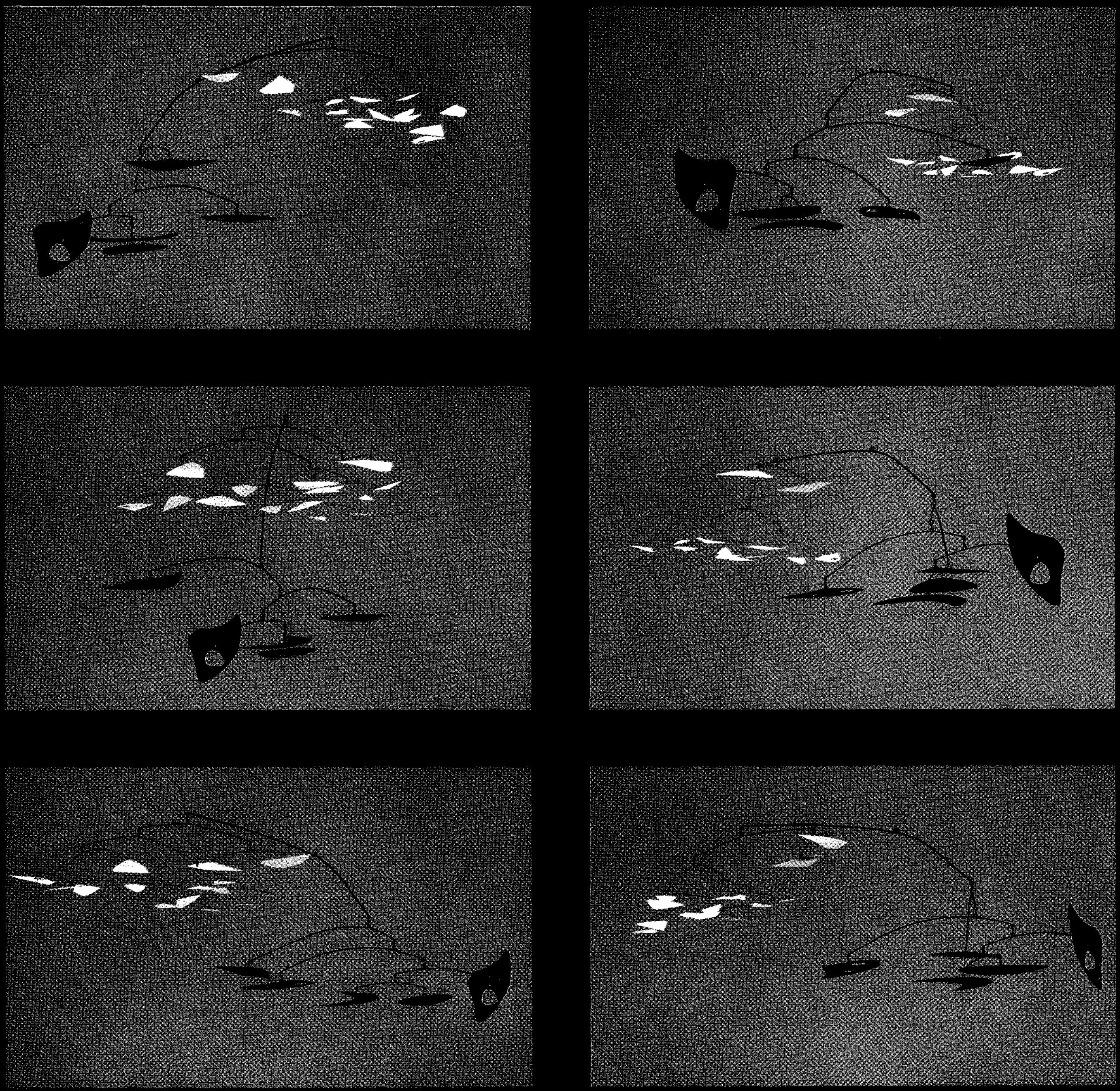

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appropriate weight. After all, Meehl asks, when we go to the store, do we let the clerk eyeball our groceries and say, "Well, it looks like seventeen dollars' worth to me"? With lots of training, the clerk might get very good at guessing. But we recognize the fact that a computer that simply adds up the prices will be more consistent and more accurate. In the Swedish study, Edenbrandt told me that Ohlin rarely made obvious mistakes. But many EKGs are in the gray zone, with some features suggesting a healthy heart and others suggesting a heart attack. It is difficult for doctors to estimate faithfully which way the mass of information tips, and it's easy to be influenced by extraneous factors, such as what the last EKG we came across looked like.

It is probably inevitable that in the next few years physicians will begin letting computers take over diagnostic decisions. One network, PAPNET, is already gaining mainstream use in the screening of digitized Pap smears—microscopic scrapings taken from a woman's cervix—for cancer or precancerous abnormalities, which is a job usually done by a pathologist. Researchers have completed more than a thousand studies on the use of neural networks in nearly every field of medicine. Networks have been developed to diagnose appendicitis, dementia, psychiatric emergencies, and sexually transmitted diseases. Others can predict success from cancer treatment, organ transplantation, and heart-valve surgery. Systems have been designed to read chest X-rays, mammograms, and nuclear-medicine heart scans.

In the treatment of disease, the medical world has already extended the lesson of the Shouldice Hospital concerning the advantages of specialized, automated care. Regina Herzlinger, a professor at the Harvard Business School, who introduced the term "health-care focussed factory" in her book "Market-Driven Health Care," points to other examples, including the Texas Heart Institute for cardiac surgery and Duke University's bone-marrow-transplant center. Breast-cancer patients seem to do best in specialized cancer-treatment centers, where they have a cancer surgeon, an oncologist, a radiation therapist, a plastic surgeon, a social worker, a nutritionist, and others who see breast cancer day in and day out. The new artificial neural networks only bring these lessons to diagnosis.

This vision of disaggregated, mechanized medicine will seem horrifying to many people. All too often, modern medical care already lacks the human touch, and its icily technocratic ethos has alienated many of the people it seeks to serve. That does much to explain why suspicion of medical expertise is growing, and why a good number of people are turning elsewhere for compassionate care—to nurse practitioners, herbalists, and holistic healers like Andrew Weil and Deepak Chopra.

And yet compassion and expertise aren't just mutually compatible; they can be mutually reinforcing. Which is to say that the machine, oddly enough, may be holistic medicine's best friend. The professional ethic of making no mistakes has often reduced care to a narrow matter of problem-solving: find the disease and fix it. But as expert systems, both large institutions and microcomputers, begin to take on more of the technical and cognitive work of medicine, generalist physicians will be in a position to embrace the humanistic dimension of care. They'll be freed to do what only they can do—talk to their patients, for instance. "Even if you have the perfect computer that can tell you what to do," Dr. Ohlin observes, "you couldn't expose a severely ill patient to the face of the computer." It's because medical care is about our life and death that we need doctors who can address our fears, hopes, and ignorance—doctors who can help give meaning to what we're going through. In the increasingly tangled web of experts and expert systems, the primary-care doctor has the obligation and the opportunity to take on the role of the patient's knowledgeable guide, contractor, and confidant. Maybe machines can decide, but only doctors can heal. ♦

In Thursday's issue of the Daily Vidette, the animal in the front-page photo was incorrectly identified as an Indian lion. In fact, the creature is an otter.

—*Daily Vidette, student newspaper of Illinois State University in Normal.*

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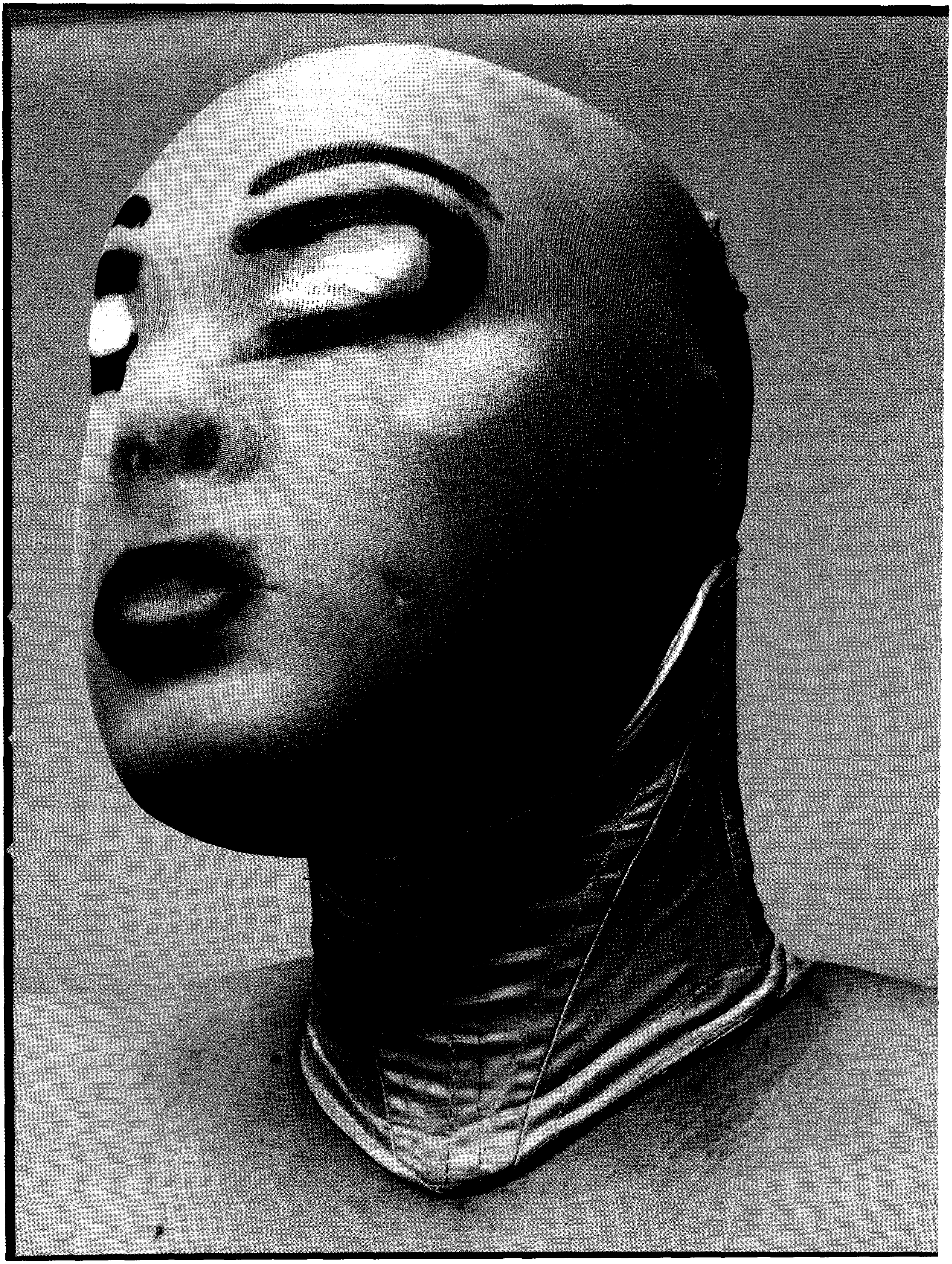
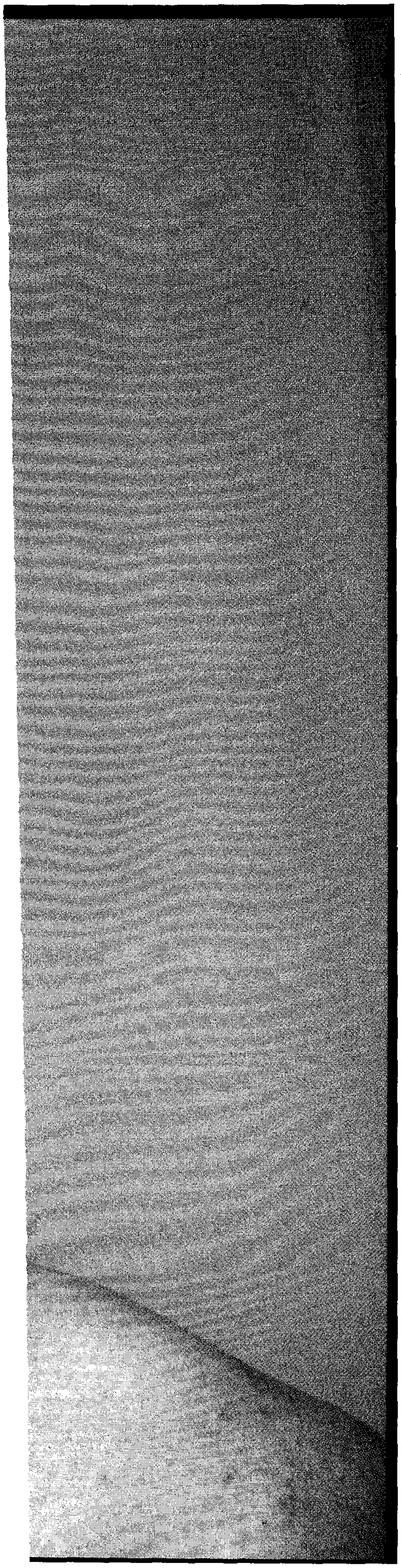


PROFILE

LIFE AS A LOOK

When Leigh Bowery died, he was hailed as an influence on everyone from Vivienne Westwood to Lucian Freud, but what was behind his various guises?

BY HILTON ALS



Friends still complain vociferously about Bowery's bad behavior, but then burst out laughing or use words like "exhilarating" or "cathartic" to describe his escapades.

FERGUS GREER/BOTAISH GROUP

MY first and only live experience of the phenomenon known as Leigh Bowery—the singular London-based performance artist, style maven, fashion designer, and model for the British painter Lucian Freud—took place in the East Village in 1993, during Wigstock, New York's annual dragfest in Tompkins Square Park. It was Labor Day weekend, sixteen months before Bowery's death, and three months before the Lucian Freud show—which included a group of nude portraits of the bald, massive, six-foot-one-inch Bowery—opened at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, granting him his widest audience yet.

At Wigstock, the park was littered with broken beer bottles, face powder, and stray glitter, as hundreds of men in drag pledged their allegiance to camp. There were Afro wigs dyed strawberry and fuchsia; eyelashes so big they looked like beetles' legs sticking out of the wearers' lids; torn purple tights; denim hot pants; and chest hair peeking out from the cleavages of leotards and catsuits. To say that it was difficult to attract attention in this crowd would be an understatement.

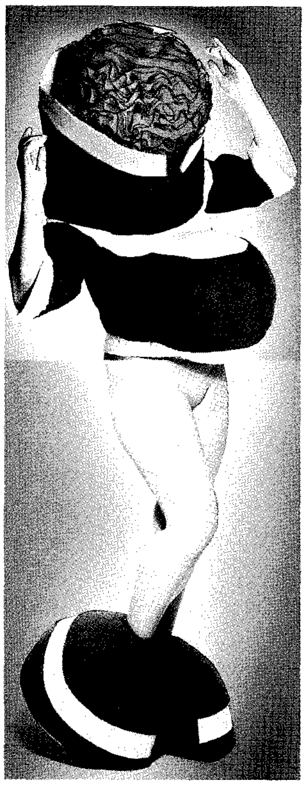
Although I had never seen Bowery perform, his reputation had preceded him. I had seen his costumes for the Michael Clark dance company—platform shoes instead of ballet slippers, T-shirts with cone-shaped breasts—in films and videos by the director Charles Atlas. I had been amused by his innovative work with the Turkish-born fashion designer Rifat Ozbek, when Ozbek introduced neck braces, padded clothing, and fencing masks to the runway. But nothing I had heard or seen prepared me for the impact of Bowery's presence when he took the Wigstock stage. His size and his manic desire to project were overwhelming. Accompanied by a blaring cover of the Beatles' "All You Need Is Love," he strode forth in a knee-length skirt, a bulging floral-print jacket, and a menacing nylon mask that zipped up the back and had openings for his eyes and mouth. Makeup had been applied directly to the mask: his lips were rendered huge, clownlike. White cotton tights and dark sensible shoes with a small heel completed the look.

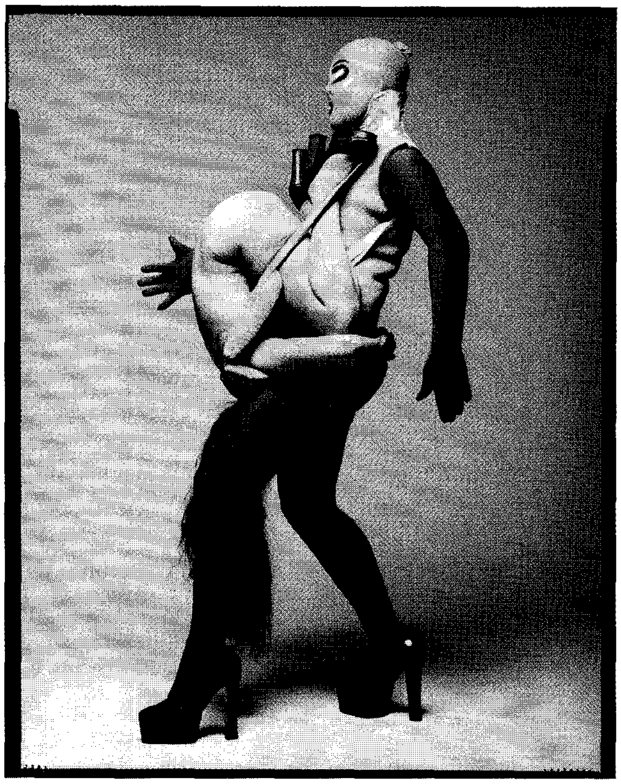
Like a number of the afternoon's earlier performers, Bowery evoked several theatrical traditions at once: actors portraying warriors in Chinese opera; severely tailored music-hall m.c.s; Ginger Rogers, shimmying in "Gold Diggers of 1933." But this was not your standard sentimental drag act—it wasn't drag at all. I was also struck by Bowery's talent for incorporating his girth into his spectacle of outrageous self-realization. The fact that he was no gym queen did not inhibit him. (Imagine Bowery at the gym. What would he have worn?) Instead, he used his bigness as a challenge and a threat. The Wigstock audience's freakishness seemed naïve, trite, and outdated by comparison.

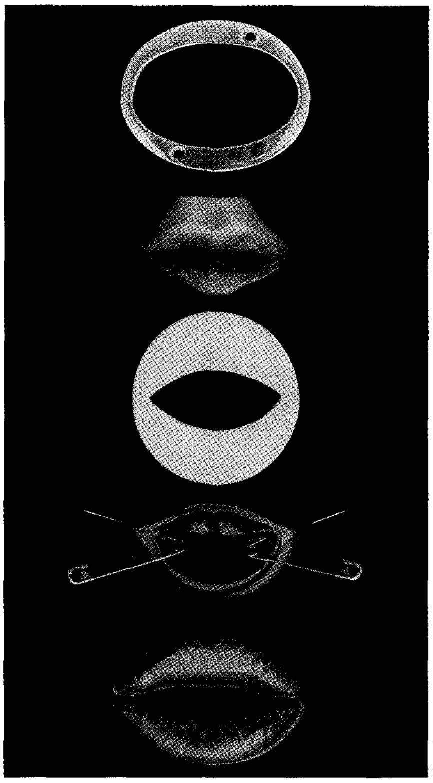
After a minute or two, half singing, half shrieking into a microphone, he clambered onto a table set up in front of the enormous Wigstock scrim of candy-colored images of girls—or, rather, boys as girls. Facing the audience, he lay back on the table, screaming and moaning, as if he were going into labor. He then parted his legs, and a human figure began to emerge from between them—a nude woman, slathered in "blood," sausage links, and slime. *She* had been the enormous bulge under his jacket, and the sight of her crawling from between Bowery's legs was heart-stopping. This was not the aspect of womanhood that the Wigstock audience was seeking to emulate. Bowery then scooped up his "baby" and exited the stage, having mangled the spectators' expectations right before their Fabulashed eyes.

Certainly the past two decades have not lacked for people who would flick their cigarette in the face of convention. For Bowery, however, this was not an impulse but a vocation. The art historian John Richardson found him remarkable in this respect: "In this jaded age, when nobody gets shocked by anything anymore, Leigh still managed to shock people in an intelligent way—in an original way."

Bowery's highly developed personal aesthetic—what he wore, what he said, how he behaved—was his principal form of rebellion, and his massive body served as both his weapon and his shield. Whether managing a night club or performing in a rock band, or simply high-kicking his way down the street, he used his physical appearance to blur the lines between maleness and femaleness, entertainment and artistic expression, power and vulnerability. The results—comic, terrifying, and unforgettable—made him a cult figure in both London and New York. Now, four years after his death, bits and pieces of his look are still being appropriated by other designers, and his importance as an artist with an unclassifiable oeuvre is still being discussed and explored. Charles Atlas is currently making a film about Bowery, and a book celebrating his career will be published by Violette Editions this summer.







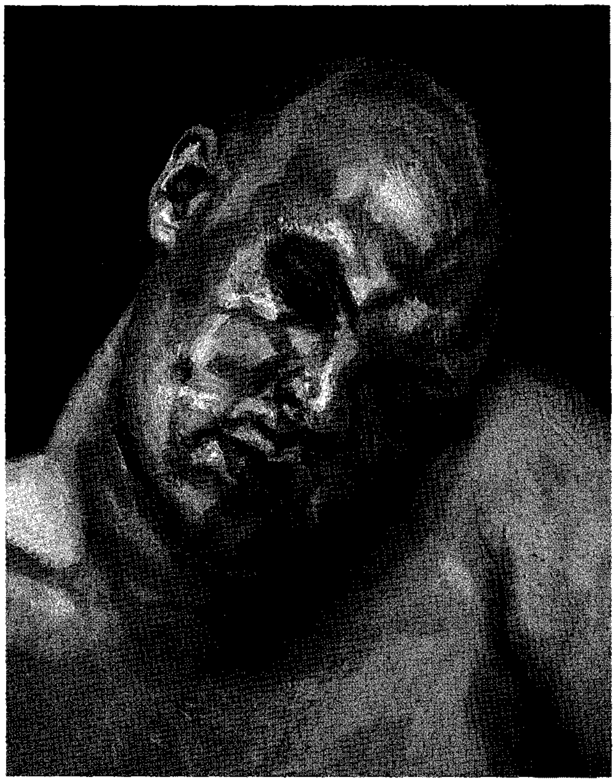
NICK KNIGHT; FERGUS GREER/BOTAISH GROUP; NICK KNIGHT

THE older of two children, Leigh Bowery was born in Sunshine, a conservative suburb of Melbourne, Australia. His parents worked as administrators for the Salvation Army, and their household was a strict but loving one. Leigh was the model of a well-behaved, gifted child: he drew, played both the piano and the flute, and got excellent grades. But he began to defy expectations early. He resisted attending Salvation Army meetings, because he disliked the brass band. ("He found it too brassy," his father, Tom Bowery, recalled.) Because he was tall, with big bones, he was a natural candidate for soccer, but Leigh soon discovered that he had no affinity or aptitude for sports. "He was a big lad, so I expected big things from him," his father later admitted.

He was an aesthete from the first, a firm believer in the external world as a mirror of the interior one; unlike most queer children, however, who are afraid of being ridiculed for their interest in clothes and decoration, he was willing to put that belief into practice. While he was recuperating from a childhood operation, an aunt taught him how to crochet, and he soon moved on to knitting. Sometimes, when his parents were out, he would reorganize the plantings in the garden or rearrange the living room: "We'd get home and you almost had to get your street directory out to find where to walk, as all the furniture had been moved," Tom Bowery remembered.

In high school, in Melbourne, Leigh was put off his studies when he realized that there were other students in his classes who were as bright as he was. Fashion was quickly claiming his imagination as a means of self-expression; it was simultaneously more private and more attention-grabbing than being a good student. After graduation, Bowery went on to study fashion design at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, but he quickly became disillusioned; he had no interest in fashion's utilitarian aspects. His father found Bowery's design innovations—knitted suits, raglan sleeves—puzzling at first, but noted that several of them became fashionable in Australia years later.

Bowery found encouragement for his burgeoning aesthetic not in Australia but in British youth publications, such as *The Face* and the *New Musical Express*, which featured articles on punk and New Wave music. In them, Sunshine's bright chirpiness of nineteen-sixties-mod-gone-sitting-room-boring was replaced by an ugly as-



Five pictures of Bowery in costume; his fake lips; and a 1991 portrait by Lucian Freud. "Bowery never felt he was achieving a complete look unless he was hurting."

CLOCKWISE: TATE GALLERY/ART RESOURCE, N.Y.; NICK KNIGHT (2); FERGUS GREER/BOTAISH GROUP

sertiveness: safety pins through the nose, ripped T-shirts, dark slabs of makeup applied to eyelids and mouth. These magazines suggested the existence of a world that defied simplistic gender classifications and bourgeois notions of health.

At eighteen, Bowery left school. He worked in a department store to save some money and, in October, 1980, migrated to London. During the day, he worked at Burger King; at night, he began to negotiate the treacherous club scene he had come halfway around the world to join. He resolved to lose weight, learn as much as he could, and wear makeup every day.

Perhaps to avoid being snubbed as a colonial, Bowery quickly developed not only an English accent but also the charm to allay such suspicions. According to his friend the d.j. Jeffrey Hinton, Bowery never talked about his background: "Australia was never mentioned in any sense." Instead, Bowery focussed on his enthusiasms—fashion, conceptual art, gossip, the transvestite star Divine—and pursued them with the all-consuming avidity of the glamour-hungry provincial determined not to remain one. At the same time, he was extremely shy and self-conscious; Baillie Walsh, a film director who had known Bowery for many years, believes that this was what galvanized him to make a spectacle of himself. He remembers one instance when Bowery saw himself naked on film: "He was really, really horrified at what he looked like, but that was the point, that's why he did it, because he was horrified. He wanted to push it, you know. He wanted to tell the joke—he didn't want to be the joke."

From the beginning, Bowery made his own outfits and designed his own look. In 1981, the trend toward romanticism was best captured in the collaboration between the British designer Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren, whose evocation of the roguish swashbuckler or fop made frills and foulards part of the populist uniform. Bowery's stroke of genius was to turn the dandy's uniform on its head by combining its romantic mannerism with an eighties modernism. Unlike the New Romantics' vests and white shirts with belled sleeves, Bowery wore his own version of the "power suit": jackets with ultra-padded shoulders and with pockets that went past the hem of the jacket, parodying excess. "He still thought Claude Montana was the biggest thing," says the record producer and former fashion designer Rachel Auburn, who knew Bowery well in the early eighties. Then, after the New Romantic look was replaced by the Hard Times look (Auburn describes this trend as "rip the sleeves off your shirts, tread on them a few times, rub a little bleach on the look"), Bowery turned to "glitter and Lycra and stretch and sequins and stars."

SUE TILLEY, a dole officer who was to become one of Bowery's closest friends, first met him at a night club, in 1982. In her 1997 memoir, "Leigh Bowery: The Life and Times of an Icon," Tilley recounts how Bowery was brought into the inner circle of the demimonde by Yvette the Conqueror, a drag queen he'd met during one of his sexual forays. (Bowery was an unabashed enthusiast of anonymous sex throughout his life.) It was Yvette who first took Bowery to Cha Cha's, the back room of Heaven, a large, popular, mostly gay disco on the Strand. "I spotted lots of the people I had only read about," Bowery later remembered. "It was even more amazing than I had imagined."

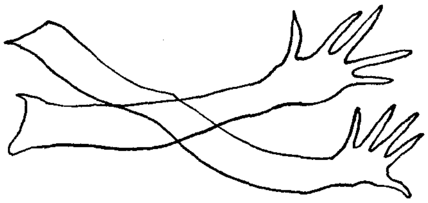
Many people were struck, upon meeting Bowery, by his friendliness and good manners, and by his keen intelligence. But from very early on this appealing demeanor was punctuated by outbursts of outrageousness: snooping through other people's belongings, stealing, masturbating in public. In one instance, when a friend at Burger King asked if he was gay, Bowery volunteered a long, confessional reply, but then felt compelled to invent fantastic lies about the sexual practices of the other employees. When another friend first met Bowery, at Cha Cha's, he was bunching up newspaper into balls, setting the balls on fire, and throwing them off the balcony onto the crowd below. Cha Cha's was run by Maria Malla Pasta and Scarlett Bordello. Bowery became infatuated with Scarlett—who wore real chicken feet as earrings—even going so far as to try to find a man who would sleep with her in order to tell him about it.

It was during this quest that he fell for a seventeen-year-old artist named Trojan, who became the unrequited love of his life. Trojan admired Bowery, but he was not interested in him romantically. Rachel Auburn remembers Bowery's efforts to wear Trojan down: "He would say to Trojan, 'If you have it off with me it will be out of my system. It's this whole Freudian thing I've got.' " This tactic was only occasionally successful. Nevertheless, the two became roommates in a council flat in the East End. (Trojan had acquired the apartment by setting his previous council flat on fire, thereby making himself eligible for a new residence.) They put up "Star Trek" wallpaper, and installed blue vinyl chairs in the living room. Bowery covered his bedroom walls with mirrored tiles. As Tilley recounts, they also fixed the doorbell to play sex sounds, but with mixed results. Bowery explained, "Every time someone pressed the bell and I heard all the gasping and moaning, I just thought it was Trojan having an asthma attack, so I never bothered to answer the door."

ALTHOUGH Bowery did not refer to himself as a designer, it was as a designer that he first attracted notice, both in and out of London. After he was fired from Burger King (for stealing), he went on the dole and began to earn extra money by making one-off outfits for friends. He used what was at hand (often cheap curtain fabric), transforming it into high-water trousers and extravagant shirts with oversized collars, big puffy shoulders, and detailed pocketing. In 1983 and 1984, he was invited by the event impresario Susanne Bartsch to be part of shows in New York and Japan announcing the new British fashion. Both Charivari and Barneys became interested in marketing Bowery's wares, but he had neither the backing nor the inclination to get his work mass-produced. "Fashion is a business, first of all," he would say later on, in a television interview. "You have to appeal to too many people."

On his return to London from New York in 1983, Bowery further radicalized his appearance. He began to create what he called the "Paki from Outer Space" look, so named because it was in part inspired by his fondness for cheap Indian cloth and jewelry. This look included platform shoes, painted silver or bronze; bright-colored striped stockings; an oversized striped tunic, sometimes with an enormous star on the front; tall hats with a swatch of fake hair attached at the back; and blue, green, or red face paint, with Hindi inscriptions across the forehead. A nose ring with a chain stretching from the nose to the ear was also sometimes part of the look. At first, Bowery was too shy to wear the Paki look himself, and he used Trojan as a model, but soon his exhibitionism outweighed his self-consciousness, and he began sporting it regularly at the clubs that he and Trojan frequented: Asylum, the Pink Panther, White Trash. Gone were the Vivienne Westwood influences; gone, too, were his somewhat halfhearted attempts to run anything approaching a design business. With the Paki look, Bowery had committed himself to the total theatricalization of the self, using the night club as his stage.

It was this look that first attracted the then twenty-one-year-old British choreographer Michael Clark, who was being heralded as the new Nijinsky. Clark later explained, "Classical ballet is all about beauty. And Leigh's work, I think . . . challenges the conventional view of what looks good." Michael Clark hired Bowery, providing a more formal setting for his work. In Clark's dances, which were accompanied by loud rock music by the Fall and fantastical sets designed by Charles Atlas, Bowery exercised his brand of haute-couture surrealism. Each of his costumes was beautifully cut and exquisitely assembled. Dancers wore caps with little wiglets attached at the back, silver platform shoes, ruffled see-through aprons, loud briefs, knee socks, and stretchy knit tights with the ass missing. (This was at least eight years before the English designer Alexander McQueen would come out with his "bumsters.")



Perhaps in recognition of the fact that Bowery's creations were becoming more and more bound to his physical self, Clark asked him to appear in the work. Eventually, Bowery would become a regular fixture on Clark's stage. Sometimes he was little more than an object, bearded, veiled, and dressed in yards of brown tulle, with gaffer's tape applied to his middle. At other times, he played the piano, danced, or commented on the other members of the company.

IN 1985, while Bowery was working for Clark and designing for friends, the club entrepreneur Tony Gordon invited Bowery to become the public face of Taboo, a small Thursday-night club-within-a-club, with mirrored balls and video screens, on Leicester Square. According to Tilley, the club's ethos was "dress as though your life depends on it, or don't bother." Marc Vaultier, who minded the door, would stick a mirror in the faces of those waiting outside and say, "Would you let yourself in?" With Bowery as an attraction, Gordon hoped to make Taboo the most *branché* club in London, and he succeeded. Soon the regulars—whom one club observer referred to as the dole-er-crats ("They live like aristocrats . . . rising late and existing on exotic forms of cheese on toast")—were joined by celebrities like John Galliano, Sade, Derek Jarman, and Boy George. The British journalist Alix Sharkey described Taboo as "London's sleaziest, campest, and bitchiest club of the moment . . . stuffed with designers, stylists, models, students, dregs, and the hopefully hip, lurching through the lasers and snarfing up amyl."

In a September, 1985, magazine interview, Bowery described his role at Taboo as "a sort of local cabaret act, I suppose—the original vaudeville drunkard." He went on, "If people see me behaving in such an outrageous manner, they won't feel inhibited themselves." But he was becoming increasingly aware of his social power. One cherished bit of Bowery lore describes Bowery bumping up against Mick Jagger: Jagger spewed, "Fuck off, freak," to which Bowery countered, "Fuck off, fossil." At the same time, Bowery was famous for his largesse at the club, often lavishing drink tickets and attention on people who were awkward or unknown. "You know, it would be someone's cousin from the country who was seventeen and out at a night club for the first time, and had put on her best clothes—Leigh would really focus in on people like that," the conceptual artist Cerith Wyn Evans recalls. "He had this great way of keeping people at a real distance but making them feel at the same time very included and very special."

It was at Taboo that Bowery met his friend, lover, and wife-to-be, Nicola Bateman. She remembers their first meeting: "He got down on one knee and he said, 'My dear, you look simply gorgeous. Where do you come from?'"

"Fur's back."

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During an era in which cultural icons like David Bowie and Madonna were making public events out of changing their look every few years, Leigh Bowery was changing his look every week. At various times, the look included: glue dribbled over his bald head, a boxy white jacket, white knee socks, and white underpants; a short pleated skirt worn with a glittery jacket, scab makeup, and a souvenir policeman's hat; flashing light bulbs behind the ears; a jacket covered in gold Lady Jane hair grips, and one eye blanketed with theatrical putty. Charles Atlas remembers the night Bowery was picked up by the police for doing high kicks while walking down the street clad only in a beaded headpiece, boots, a sequinned bra, and a pubic wig.

Most of Bowery's looks involved some element of discomfort: the gaffer's tape he wore, to create the illusion of breasts, cut into his skin; the cheek-piercings he endured, for fastening on safety pins and fake lips, were vulnerable to infection; the pubic wig entailed tucking his penis and testicles between his legs, and with the wig glued in place it was impossible to urinate. "He never felt that he was achieving a complete look unless he was hurting," Baillie Walsh told me. But while Bowery had a high threshold for physical pain, he was extremely sensitive to criticism. Les Child, who danced with Michael Clark's company, once told Bowery that a pair of papier-mâché antlers were "wrong with a capital W," and Bowery was furious: "He wouldn't speak to me the whole day," Les Child recalled, "and that's when I started to realize how fiercely he was taking this whole thing. It was going to another level."

Bowery was uncompromising in his vision. He would eventually part ways with Michael Clark over a look that prominently featured the word "cunt," and his "Mammy" look deeply offended Les Child. At the same time, Bowery was extremely intolerant of what he considered bad taste in others. At one point, he took a disliking to a big bow that was part of Nicola's look: "He used to throw it off the balcony quite frequently," Nicola recalled. "I would go downstairs and retrieve it, and it would just go over the balcony again, and then in the end I gave up, so that ended *that* look." In her memoir, Tilley writes, "If Leigh came to your house and saw something he didn't like he would throw it out of the window. I dreaded him coming round after Christmas, as most of my presents would end up on the roof of the nursery outside my flat."

Soon the demands of Bowery's costuming were more than he could handle. Trojan (who was to die of a drug overdose, in 1986) had left the apartment after becoming involved with the young filmmaker John Maybury, and Bowery was corralling new friends—"slaves," as they were dryly called—who would prove useful to him: first Nicola, who was a textile and costume designer; then Pearl, a male corset-maker who sometimes worked with Nicola. Wyn Evans remembers both Pearl and Bowery as being "mental" about craftsmanship: "The ultimate treat would be to rip the lining out of a couture jacket and look at the way in which the thing had been engineered."

Nicola and Pearl would be sent on what Bowery called "the stitch-bitch trail": the circuit of shops that contained the fabric and trimmings he used. Both, in a sense, became part of Bowery's creations, sometimes literally: Nicola was the "baby" in his Wigstock performance. One of Bowery's more elaborate looks involved Pearl as a human bustle, doubled over beneath the fabric at Bowery's back end; in order to move with the flow of the material, he wore roller skates. The designer was famous not only for working his slaves extremely hard but also for setting them against each other and subjecting them to verbal abuse. During a heated exchange, Bowery knocked out one of Pearl's front teeth.

More than a decade later, Nicola is frank about the abuse, but has no regrets about her devotion. "He found me amus-

COURTESY BONNI BENRUBI GALLERY

AMONG FRIENDS *Over the past six decades, including his many years as the editorial director of Condé Nast, Alexander Liberman ming and Elsa Maxwell. A retrospective of his photographs at the Bonni Benrubi Gallery, through April 18th, includes this one of*

th and photographed such luminaries as Pablo Picasso, Marcel Duchamp, Coco Chanel, del Lisa Fonssagrives in a tête-à-tête with Irving Penn in 1950, the year they married.

ing, and I was useful," she told me. "I could do these costumes for him, and I was quite happy to do it. I thought he was a brilliant artist, and I wanted to help him in any way that I could in the field. I thought he was really worth it." Nicola came to recognize that Bowery would get especially uptight before heading off to the club in a new look. "I said to him, 'That's fine, I know you're going to be a right old cunt to me beforehand. Just as long as you treat me nicely afterwards, that's fine.' "

Although many of Bowery's friends were critical of Nicola's long-standing devotion to her husband, in some ways her position was simply an extreme version of their own. Everyone who knew Bowery put up with a great deal: that was the price of the ticket, and very few were willing to miss the show.

THE tension between being seen and not seen, brazen and ashamed, played itself out not only at night but in his day look as well—which was, in a sense, more threatening than anything Bowery ever invented for the club scene. After getting out of bed (he often slept with a tea cozy on his bald head, to keep it warm), Bowery frequently put on a ratty gray wig with the netting showing, applied a dab of rouge to each cheek, and dressed in green pants, a brown jacket, and medium heels stuffed into clogs. Bowery's friends repeatedly likened his day look to that of a child molester, or an escapee from a mental institution. "Embarrassment was a very strong emotion for him," Wyn Evans remembered. "But one little hit of something would topple him over the edge and make him totally, totally able to embarrass anyone else who was around."

Bowery had remained in close touch with his parents, and his mother came to visit him in London, but he didn't return home until 1987, after Taboo had closed, when he was invited to do a fashion show in Melbourne. Michael Clark's company was to be there at the same time, and the dancers agreed to participate in the show. Bowery wrote to Tilley—on Salvation Army stationery—describing the disastrous consequences:

> I'm in my room at the moment typing this letter with the door shut. It's 95° f. My mother is in her room with

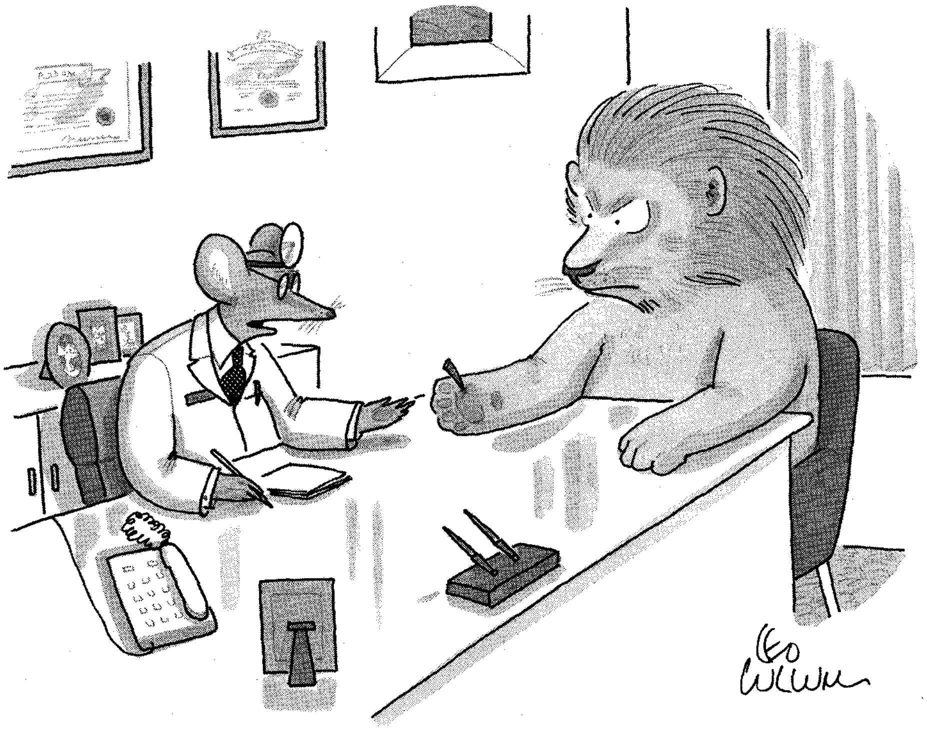
> the door shut. She's crying. . . . What was planned by my mother to be the pièce de résistance of a triumphant homecoming turned out to be the most mortifying experience of her life. She was seated in the Town Hall of Melbourne surrounded by all her friends and relatives and had to endure the most self indulgent and sick show she's ever likely to see. Which explains why I'm typing a ten thousand word essay in my bedroom while she's crying her heart out.

Bowery's parents found him bewildering, but they never distanced themselves from their only son. (He remained especially close to his mother, who died of cancer, in 1994.) But he was incapable of curbing his behavior for their sake. Inhibitions—especially his own—were there to be overcome.

By the late nineteen-eighties, Bowery's reputation extended well beyond the club scene. In 1987, he got a job as co-host, with Steve Blame, of a European MTV chat show called "Take the Blame." Watching Bowery's physical transformations with bustles, corsets, and breasts at Taboo is said to have influenced Vivienne Westwood, who had once been a source of Bowery's inspiration. "Leigh was transforming the body before Vivienne and Comme des Garçons," the designer Rifat Ozbek says. Ozbek also learned from Bowery, and the influence of their collaboration can be seen in the new collection by the Belgian designer Walter Van Beirendonck. Bowery had also acquired a number of unusual personal clients, like Boy George and the drag performer Lanah Pellay. "Bowery was the only person who could design for a sex-change superstar, darling," Pellay told a television interviewer. "He was the only person who could design for an epicene dream, and that was me."

Although Bowery was not always emotionally accessible when he was in a look, he was addicted to the telephone and spent hours every day gossiping and sharing intimacies with his friends, always with a dictionary close at hand—not only to enlighten himself but to correct others. He was a dazzling liar, often spinning his stories out over long stretches of time, and he was also adept at drawing out people's secrets to use against them. Baillie Walsh was the object of one such prank. "Lanah Pellay had been over at Leigh's, telling him how fabulous I thought she was, which wasn't true," he remembers. "And so he phoned me up and drew me out on how I felt about Lanah. And he had her listening in on the extension."

While all of this may have been just another act in Bowery's theatre of embarrassment, it may also have been a means of shattering what W. H. Auden identified as the English tendency to "judge the arts and, by extension, artists by the values appropriate to the conduct of family life." Friends and acquaintances of Bowery's still complain vociferously about his bad behavior—but then burst out laughing, or use words like "exhilarating" or "cathartic" to describe his escapades. Walsh called him "a fabulous monster." The gallery owner Anthony d'Offay said he was like a mirror in which others saw their conscious and unconscious thoughts.



"It is thornlike in appearance, but I need to order a battery of tests."

IN 1988, Bowery discovered that he was H.I.V. positive. Sue Tilley was the only friend he told about his condition. He tried to tell Nicola, but she was so devastated that he pretended it had been a prank. Bowery was terrified that people would feel sorry for him or attribute his outrageous behavior to anger over his illness: he was beginning to think of his performances as a form of art as much as a form of entertainment. That same year, d'Offay offered him a show, in which he wore different costumes and struck poses in front of a one-way mirror. The press note read, "Leigh Bowery, cultural icon about town, clothing designer, co-host of MTV's chatshow, 'Take the Blame,' dancer and nightclub host, is having his first individual exhibition at the Anthony d'Offay Gallery. Bowery will be installing himself."

"All these people used to come," Lorcan O'Neill, a director of the d'Offay gallery, told me. "Art-world people came, and club people came, and kids came. . . . You felt that you were in the exact right place in the world, at the right time, and that there was no better place to be." He added, "Lots of things get an enormous amount of attention at the moment they're done. But ten years later people aren't necessarily talking about them."

As the eighties passed into the nineties, Bowery's vacillations between masking and unmasking became ever more extreme. His fondness for thick facial makeup had given way to hoods that covered the head entirely, and he and Pearl designed elaborate neck corsets covered in lace or exotic stones. In one look, his entire head was a pom-pom, his features indiscernible; his costumes became increasingly sculptural, with spherical arms, misshapen legs, or built-in breasts. At the same time, he was as willing as ever to take his clothes off.

Many of his performance pieces—first with his gender-bending trio, the Quality Street Wrappers, and then with the art-rock group Minty—involved not only nudity but vomiting, urinating, or defecating. During one notorious performance at an AIDS benefit in Brixton, Bowery, who had given himself an enema before going onstage, lost control of his bowels when his corset poked him, and accidentally sprayed the audience. In a piece he performed in Japan, with Nicola, he pretended to be a store mannequin in a red knit dress; she pulled a thread from the dress and unravelled it until he was completely naked. In Holland, Bowery hung upside down and naked, with clothespins pinching his penis and nipples, and exclaimed, "No embarrassment at all! Oh my God, this fantastic feeling!" Then a fellow band member, Richard Torry, pushed him through a large piece of plate glass.

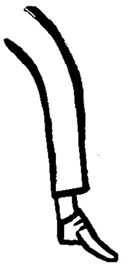
BOWERY received a fair amount of publicity for these exploits, but he was to achieve sustained attention in an unexpected manner: as a model for Britain's best-known portraitist, Lucian Freud. Freud had been introduced to Bowery years before, at Taboo, by a mutual friend, the poet Angus Cook, and he had also spotted Bowery a couple of times on the street. About a year after the d'Offay show, he asked Bowery out for lunch.

"At the point at which Lucian contacted me," Bowery wrote, in a 1993 piece for *Modern Painters*, a British art magazine, "I had just completed a series of shows in which I danced virtually naked, working some novel and surprising effects." Nevertheless, Bowery admitted that he had felt a bit shy:

> I was very nervous about my naked body when the idea of sitting for a picture for Lucian first came up, not only because I'm an unusually big heifer carting around 16 or 17 stones, but because of some of my body piercings in both my cheeks. . . . So, when I thought of this catalogue of ghoulish features, I began to feel self-conscious and a little embarrassed—distant from the regular nudes.

Characteristically, however, Bowery went ahead and accepted Freud's job offer.

Bowery's dedication to Freud was a passive version of the discipline he had applied to his own creations; certainly he viewed modelling as part of his larger struggle for self-expression. He posed for months at a time, often for seven hours a day, and he was scrupulous about maintaining a consistent weight and look. In time, Freud introduced Bowery to his friends, and Bowery shared the details of his life with the painter. Unsurprisingly, Bowery's affection for Freud spurred him to familiar rituals of rebellion and self-protection. He would nick money from Freud's wallet and make fun of him behind his back; he even stole two unfinished paintings, which were returned only after his death. Nevertheless, Bowery revered Freud, both as an artist and a teacher—so much so that he began to speak like him.



Within that working relationship, Bowery became something more than his corporeal self, nude and majestic: he became a work of art that would unquestionably enter the canon. "My physical features which so worried me in the beginning?" he joked in *Modern Painters*. "They are now in paintings which are housed in the greatest collections and museums in the world!"

Bowery developed a strong desire to influence Freud: he regaled the painter with colorful stories about both his artistic and his sexual exploits; he imported the hierarchies of his private life into the studio by recommending both Nicola and Sue as regular models; he even added a few dabs of paint to the portraits when Freud wasn't looking. And Bowery's instincts, if a bit grandiose, were also perceptive. When Freud chose Bowery for his subject, he both honored Bowery's strangeness and appropriated its charge for his own work.

"It doesn't seem strange now, but at the time it seemed the most bizarre thing for somebody like Leigh to be sitting for somebody like Lucian Freud," Lorcan O'Neill says. O'Neill believes that it was a stroke of genius: "The psychological power of the pictures went whooshing up for me."

The Lucian Freud show, which came to the Metropolitan in the winter of 1993, gave Bowery a kind of high-art legitimacy that would have seemed impossible several years before. And he accepted it on his own terms: Freud did not attend the opening, but his most striking model glided into the galleries wearing a wide-skirted floral gown, a matching face mask, and a Kaiser helmet. "The extraordinary thing was that it was never drag—it was really a costume," William Lieberman, the chairman of twentieth-century art at the Met, said. "I mean, he wasn't trying to imitate or personify anyone else. He was simply creating a new being."

ELEVEN months later, in November, 1994, Nicola arrived home after a modelling session with Freud and found an enigmatic note from Bowery, saying that he had gone to the hospital with meningitis. "Nice, wasn't it? To come back at two in the morning to find that your husband is in hospital and he hasn't told you which fucking hospital he is in, and he'll ring you tomorrow?" For the next few weeks, Bowery refused to let Nicola and Sue tell anyone that he was severely ill, but the news got out.

Because of what he'd symbolized in life, metaphors of performance inevitably surrounded his death. Several of Bowery's close friends couldn't bear to visit him in the hospital. "You know, in 'Female Trouble,' right in the end when Divine's in prison, in that outfit, lying there bald, going to the electric chair?" Rifat Ozbek said. "That is probably how he was in his hospital gown, just sitting, and I didn't want to see him like that." And in the final days, when he was hooked up to a morphine drip, with a strap-on oxygen mask and various bags of fluids, his friends agreed that if he'd seen this look on anyone else he would have stolen it for a performance. He died on New Year's Eve.

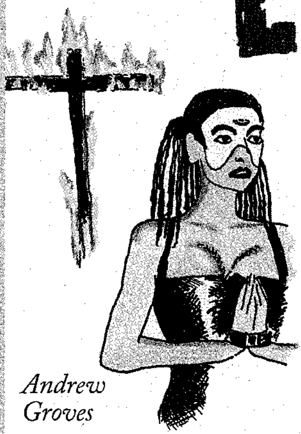
Afterward, Sue Tilley went back to the hospital to see him one more time. "He was lying on the bed naked with all the tubes and wires removed," she later wrote. "He looked truly fantastic, just like himself, but empty." This, they decided, was how he should be buried. Lucian Freud paid to have Bowery's body shipped back to Australia, where he was to be buried next to his mother. When the undertakers attempted to lower the casket into the ground, they discovered that it was too big for the space that had been allotted. ♦

LONDON MILAN

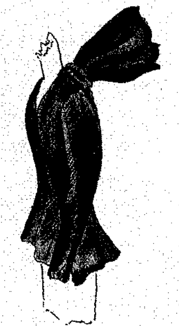
BY MICHAEL ROBERTS

The recent London collections confirmed a certain cooling toward Cool Britannia. Tony Blair may be beating the drum for Britain as a thrill ride into the millennium, but gothic touches such as burning crosses, chain-mail dresses, medieval shrouds, and a sinister silhouette owing something to the Coneheads seem rather superfluous to the trip, especially when served up against a background of two-hour delays in damp, far-flung Dickensian warehouses. The most entertaining aspect of the entire week was anticipating the sartorial manifestations of Isabella Blow. A genuinely gothic English stylist of the Sitwell school, la Blow turned up at one show swathed in an antique kimono surmounted by a sort of purple brocade satellite dish and at another with a whole lobster on her head. She is moving to Paris.

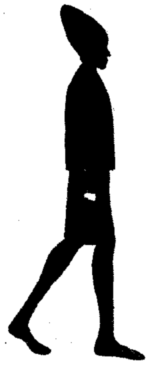
Meanwhile, Milan, whose glitzy Via Spiga boutiques are game parks for the more predatory species of shopper, was red in tooth and claw on the catwalks, too. Fur, rehabilitated after a micro moment on the p.c. blacklist, was back with a vengeance. Fashioned into coats, jackets, skirts, tops, and even thick, flaunt-it-all dresses, it also turned up as footwear at one Italian house, thanks to Manolo Blahnik, who created a revisionist version of that seventies horror the Yeti Boot.



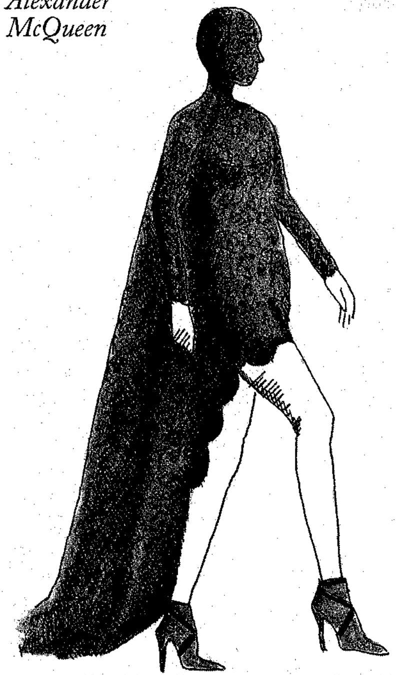
Andrew Groves



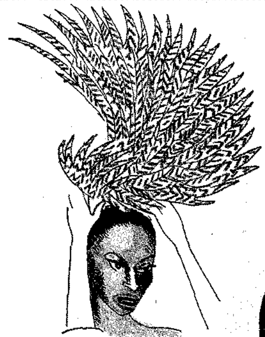
Deborah Milner



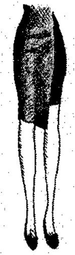
Hussein Chalayan



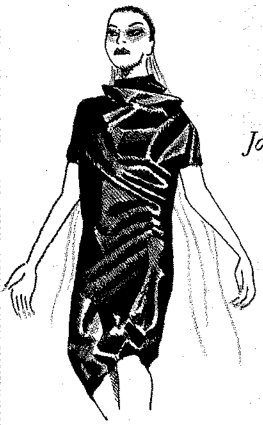
Alexander McQueen



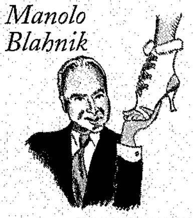
Philip Treacy



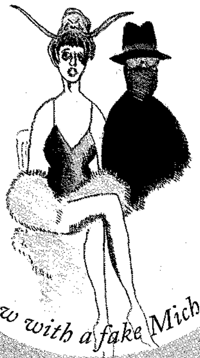
John Rocha



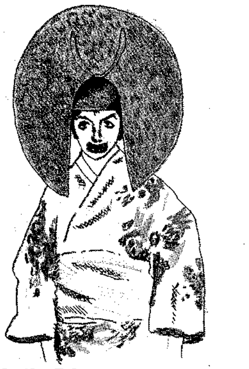
Tristan Webber



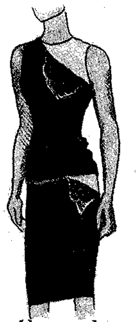
Manolo Blahnik



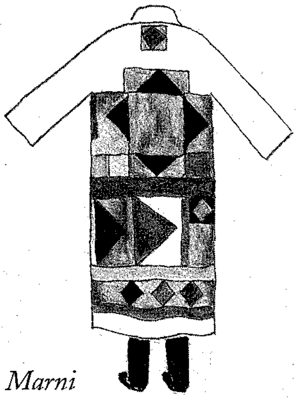
Isabella Blow with a fake Michael Jackson



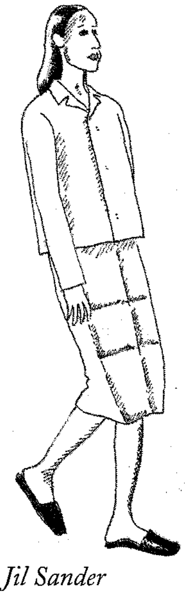
Isabella Blow



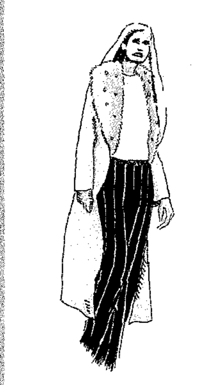
Alessandro Dell' Acqua



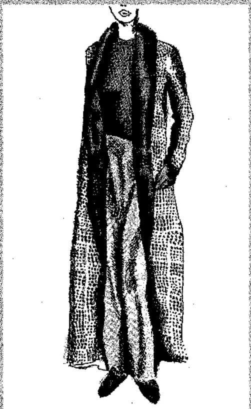
Marni



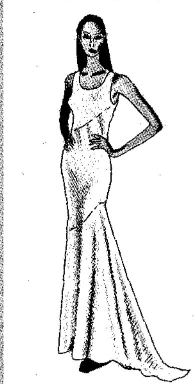
Jil Sander



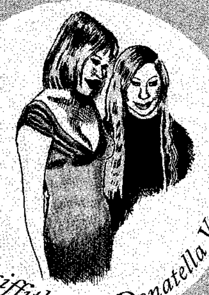
Versace



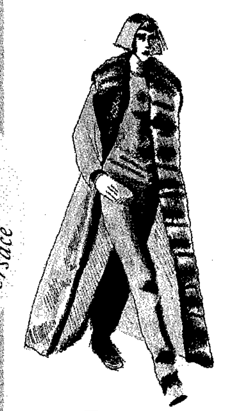
Giorgio Armani



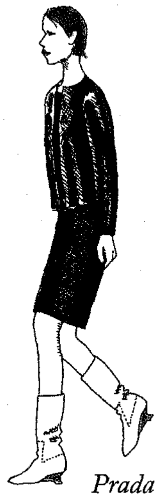
Calvin Klein



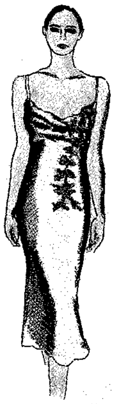
Melanie Griffith with Donatella Versace



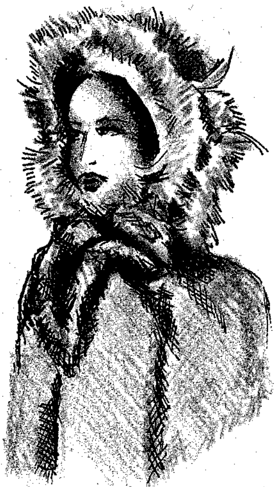
Erreuno



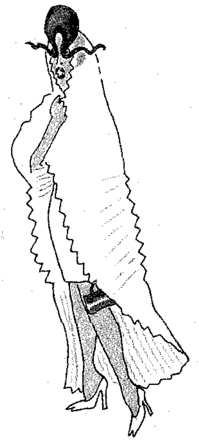
Prada



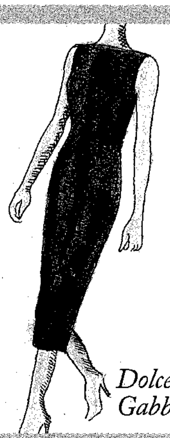
Etro



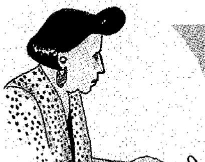
Gianfranco Ferre



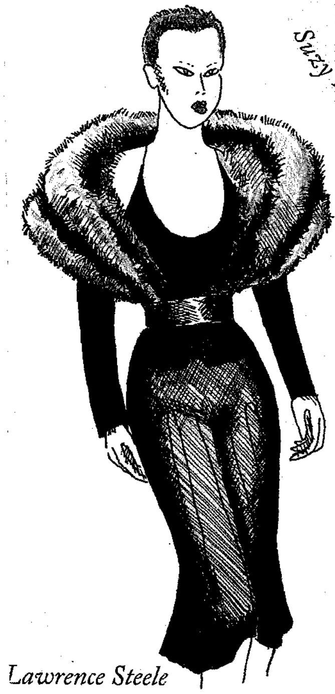
Isabella Blow in Milan



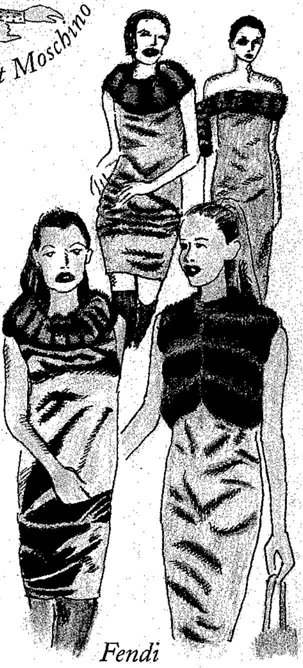
Dolce & Gabbana



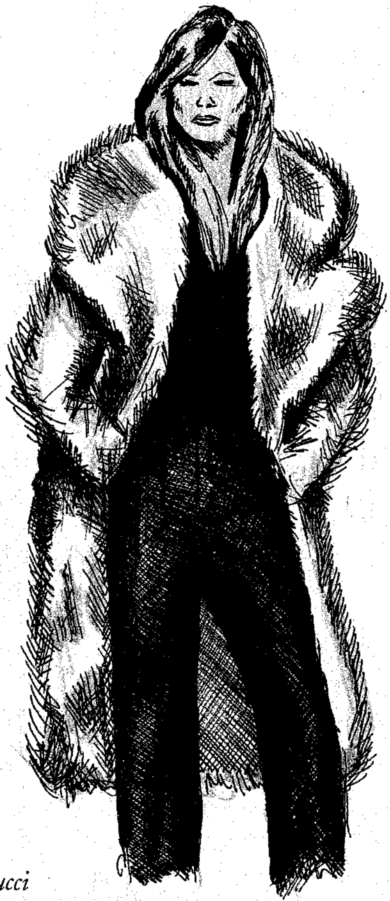
Suzy Menkes at Moschino



Lawrence Steele



Fendi



Gucci

ANNALS OF RETAIL

VICTORIA'S SECRET

How do you become the most sought-after saleswoman in New York?

BY MIMI SWARTZ

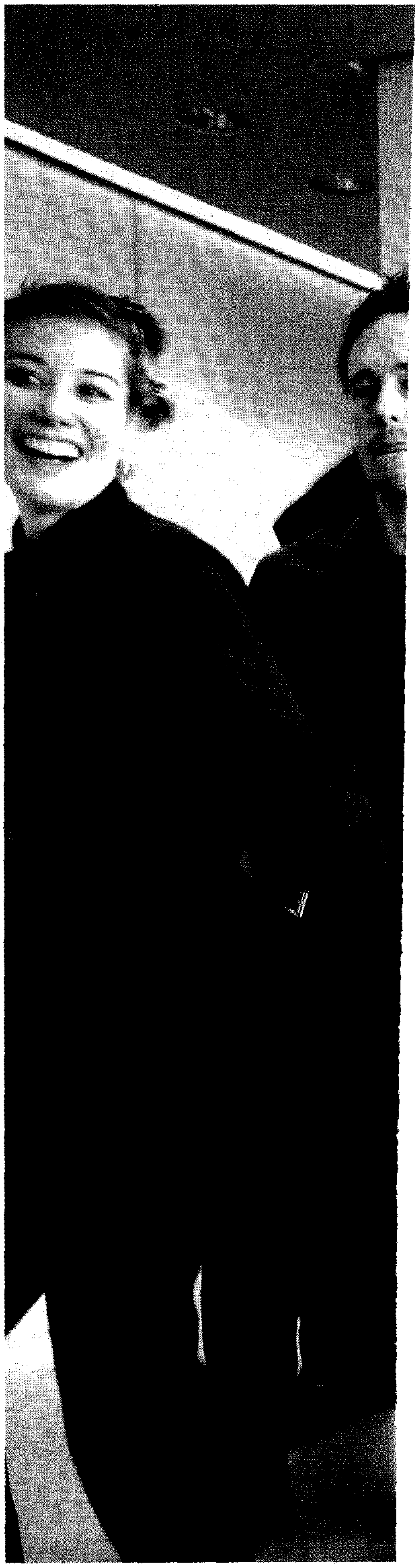
IN the beginning, when she was having trouble with the Prada mystique, the sales associate Victoria Gallegos created a fantasy to keep herself motivated. She imagined that the sleek four-story store, at Seventieth and Madison, with its pale-green walls, glass elevator, and pinkish-beige carpet, was a "castle of magic." The burly security guards at the front door, with their walkie-talkies and earpieces, were castle sentries. The salespeople were fairy godmothers (or godfathers), whose job was to cloak their customers in a magic dust that would protect and inspire them in the outside world. It is a girlish, sentimental fantasy, and aptly describes the power of fashion, but it also happens to be completely at odds with the Prada style. The designer Miuccia Prada's clothes are, after all, among the most understated and sophisticated in the world. Solemn nylon coats, stern jackets, slip dresses that appear to be beaded on gossamer—the clothes come in challenging colors and unforgiving fabrics, and are cut in a vernacular that requires an education not just in fashion history but in irony.

Most members of the Prada sales staff are assiduously cool young people who affect thick, sixties-revival eyeglasses or orange hair in multiple pigtails. They look just right in those snug, sombre Prada outfits. Victoria, however, who is petite and pretty, and has long black hair tumbling out of a red plastic banana clip, wears quarter-inch-thick eyeliner and brilliantly hued rhinestone earrings, and paints her lips in tropical shades. "I'm Latin," she says. "I like color." Anyone observing Victoria over time might wonder whether she wouldn't be happier in a flashier place—Versace, say, or even Target, where her wearing a "Hunchback of Notre Dame" Band-Aid or handing out Russell Stover Santas at Christmas might be less jarring.

But Victoria Gallegos, at twenty-seven, is the highest-selling salesperson in Prada's Madison Avenue store—and, by extension, in the company. Though her specialty is menswear, she sells everything: belts, handbags, shoes, suitcases, briefcases, key cases, golf bags, women's clothing, appointment books, and underwear. Last year, her first at the store, she sold around two million dollars' worth of merchandise. Combining old-fashioned sales psychology with new technologies, Victoria moves the merchandise in ways that seem magical even to the people who hired her.

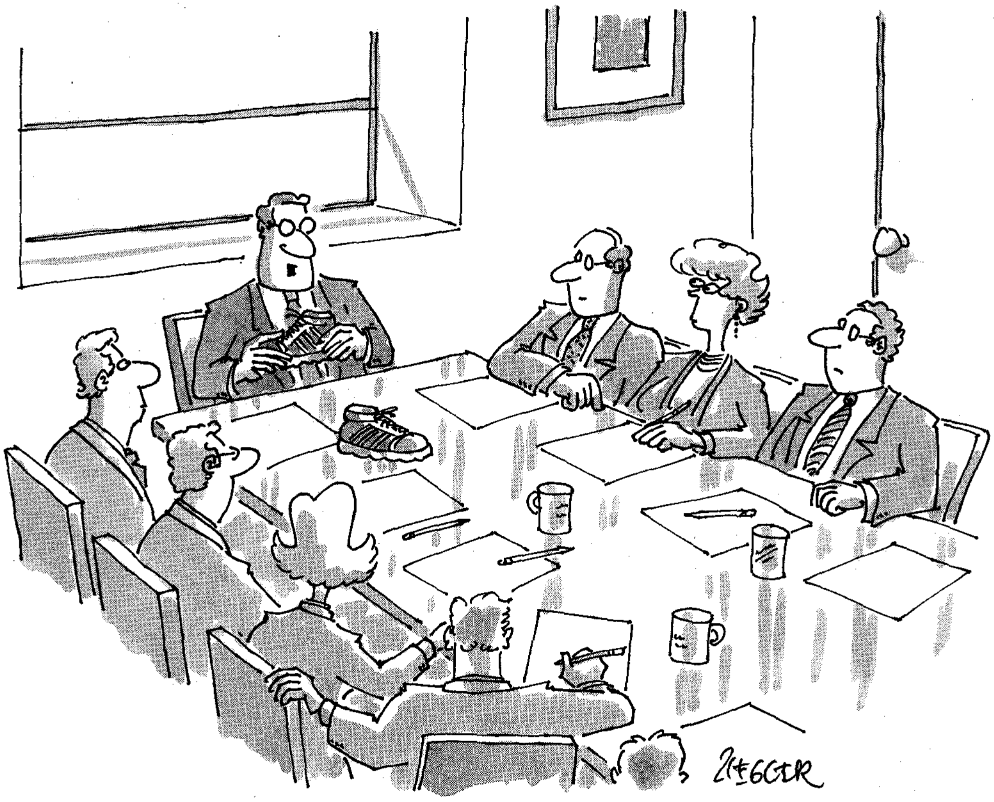
Her skills are crucial in the world of high-end shopping. Fashion may have gone global, but the pool of customers actually willing to pay for designer clothes (as opposed to movie stars or models, who get them free or at hefty discounts) remains limited. As clothes have become more difficult to understand, and far more expensive to acquire, these customers have become more demanding. For better stores, this means that the much talked-about service economy is now a harsh and competitive reality. "The salesperson's job has become more complicated," says Donna Faircloth, the director of public relations in the United States for Dolce & Gabbana. "They're not always leading the customer; the customer is often leading them. It definitely raises the stakes." The most coveted clients can now buy certain pieces before they're available in stores, or can have sale items stashed away, or can get a particular garment recut in a different fabric. If they shop with someone like Victoria, they may also receive cakes on their birthdays, hospital visits when they're ailing, and even assistance with their love lives, all in the service of designer fashion.

Prada is gambling many millions of dollars that it can complete its transformation from a small, family-owned



Victoria Gallegos (center) with her Pra

'eagues. "You change people's lives," she says. "Men come in and say, 'Help me.' They have no clue." Photograph by Max Vadukul.



"Of course, ladies and gentlemen, the optimum endorsement would be from the Crips and the Bloods."

Italian company, which was once revered by the European élite for its incomparable leather goods, into an international fashion conglomerate. Miuccia Prada, the granddaughter of the company's founder, who took over the firm in 1978, started a craze ten years ago with a simple nylon backpack; by the early nineties, shrewd marketing had made her clothes a favorite of the young, voguish movie-star set. (Uma Thurman and Nicole Kidman wore Prada to the Academy Awards.) Now fashion cognoscenti have taken to sneering that Prada is "over," which means that its look has trickled down to shopping-mall chains like The Limited. But sales last year were up sixty-six per cent from 1996, to six hundred and ninety-six million dollars. This year, new stores will open in locations that include Beverly Hills and Las Vegas. There are plans for Prada home furnishings and a Prada fragrance, which are part of a bigger plan to convert Miuccia Prada's edgy aesthetic into a brand name like Polo or Nike.

Any designer with global ambitions has to get the attention of the world, and the best place to do that is on the fifteen-block stretch of Madison Avenue north of Fifty-seventh Street, which was once filled with small, exclusive boutiques and is now filled with large, exclusive boutiques. Along with Prada, there are Ralph Lauren, Giorgio Armani, Calvin Klein, Gianni Versace, and Dolce & Gabbana—fashion temples dedicated to particular tastes that, given the vast popularity of the designers, often seem to be rather sparsely attended. That's because attendance isn't really required for what these stores set out to accomplish. "The store needs to be a profitable business," one Madison Avenue retail manager says. "But it also becomes your vehicle for advertising and P.R." Fashion is not unlike high school, with Americans as the coolest kids; shoppers in Tokyo won't enter a designer store unless they know that there are branches in hip places like Rodeo Drive and Madison Avenue.

Madison Avenue shoppers, in fact, are likely to be people with money and power who are obsessive about costuming themselves impeccably for their public lives. The Europeans look over the goods with petulance, the Asians with eagerness, and the Americans with hunger, although what they are hungry for seems, ultimately, illusory. "Nobody needs anything" is a cliché of luxury retailing, but the fact is that what many of these customers need appears to be provided more often by the salesperson than by the product. They want someone to affirm their importance, their fabulous lives, and their flawless taste. "They need someone to take a good X-ray," Gabriella Forte, the president and C.O.O. of Calvin Klein, says.

Prada's regular customers sometimes stop by just to chat, or to show off the new pulls for their kitchen drawers or even clothes they've bought at another store. "The main difference between European and American women," Maurizio De Giorgis, a Prada sales associate from Portofino, explains, "is that American women buy more, and it's more difficult to make them happy because they have so much." These customers want novelty, they want celebrity-calibre attention, they want inner peace—all of which are much more difficult to deliver than a six-hundred-dollar sweater.

BUT delivering that kind of personalized service isn't difficult for Victoria. "The goal in this business should not be to sell two to three million a year," she says. "The goal should be to create great relationships with the clients." That starts with the first encounter. Victoria reserves particular contempt for opening lines such as "Can I help you?" or "Do you have any questions?" She says, "You learn not to ask those questions—the answer's always going to be no. You have to accommodate a client's life style. You talk about what they're wearing—you say, 'That's a great scarf.' "

Victoria provided a crash course in client relations one day recently when a Brazilian couple in their mid-twenties appeared in the men's department, looking for a jacket. Victoria spotted them immediately, but hung back, as she usually does, taking their measure. "What you wear is a little story about your life," she says. The woman, who was blond, was wearing leggings, boots, and a faux Prada jacket; her husband was wearing bluejeans, sneakers, a white T-shirt, and a faded-red Polo sweater. In what is not an uncommon sight in Madison Avenue boutiques, they were necking furiously—it's spending as foreplay.

The man sauntered toward the racks, inspected a few price tags, and then looked toward his wife and said, in Portuguese, "This stuff is so inexpensive."

"Nice sweater," Victoria said to the man, in English, though her Portuguese is perfectly good.

She asked a few questions, and then directed the couple—call them João and Maria—to some suits on sale. After trying on a few, João bought one, along with some pants and some shirts that Victoria had brought to the dressing room. She kept engaging Maria in conversation, and listened carefully to her opinions. ("You never give less attention to the female than to the man," she says. "Just because she's not buying doesn't mean she can't break the sale.")

Victoria asked João what he did. Europeans don't like the question, she knows, but South Americans don't mind it. He told her he was a lawyer. Victoria showed him a briefcase. He bought it. She showed him a portfolio to put inside the briefcase. He bought that, too. Then Victoria turned pensive. "You're buying all this stuff—what are you gonna put it in?" she asked, and then she found, for the couple's approval, a large black duffelbag with wheels (Victoria stresses product knowledge—all great salespeople know exactly what they have in stock at any moment.) "So you can take more trips to New York City," she suggested, grinning. João and Maria conversed in Portuguese, kissed, and bought the duffelbag, too.

That sale totalled five thousand dollars. Victoria seated her customers on a sofa near the shoe department while she ran the charges on João's corporate American Express card. João and Maria went back to necking. Victoria offered them something to drink.

"Water? San Pellegrino? Coke?"

"Coke," they answered in unison.

"Diet or regular?"

"Regular."

Then João caught sight of a penny loafer. Victoria asked him if he would like to try on a pair, then departed. João and Maria fell back into each other's arms.

Victoria returned with the loafers and with a tray holding two glasses of ice, two Cokes, and two cookies topped with multicolored sprinkles on a small doily-covered plate. She often brings cookies to work for just such an occasion. The couple ate hungrily while João tried on the shoes. It wasn't actually the pair he'd selected. In the stockroom, Victoria had discovered that the store had sold out of those, so she'd substituted a pair in a lighter shade. ("If a client wants something and you're out of it, you don't come down from the stockroom empty-handed," she declares. "You don't know how happy clients are when I come down with loads of stuff.")

She told João, "You can wear them while the weather's still warm in Brazil. Especially with a tan."

João bought the shoes. "Do you need a belt with that?" Victoria asked.

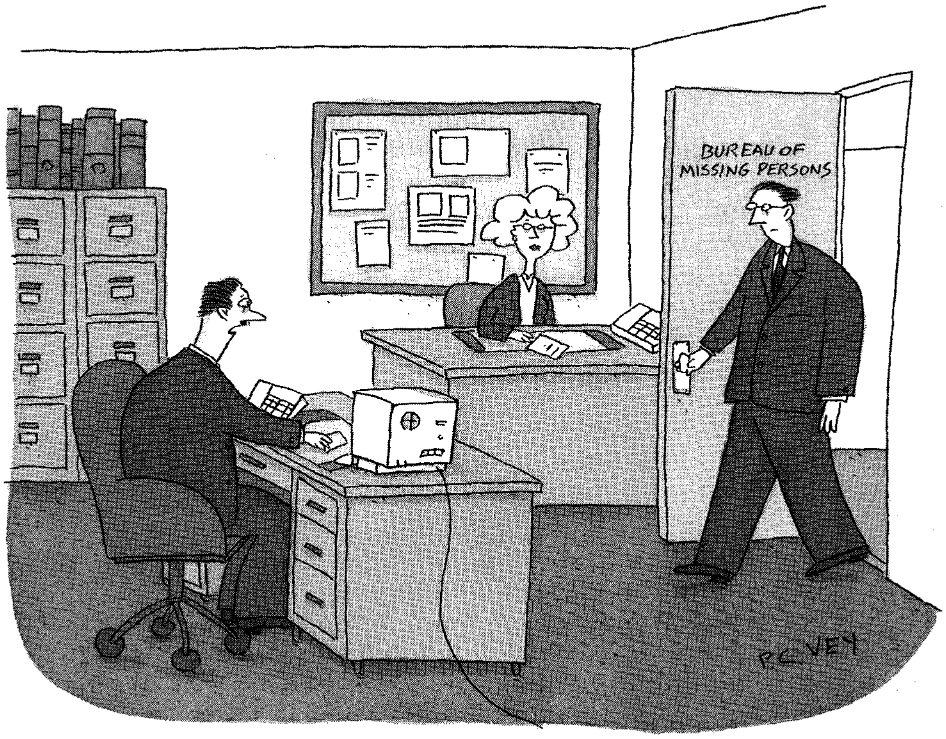
"O.K., yeah," he answered.

While boxing up the shoes, Victoria noticed that Maria had wandered over to a tray of men's wallets. She seemed to prefer the nylon ones to the leather, so Victoria complimented her on her choice, adding, "Nylon is nice because it doesn't scratch." Then, turning to João—and, because it's O.K. to joke with Latins, whereas if he had been Asian she wouldn't have dared—she said, "You can put her picture in it." Maria liked the joke, and the wallet was soon Brazil-bound. Prada's take for these last-minute buys came to another thousand dollars. "You have nice writing," Victoria said, studying João's signature on the charge slip.

After they left, Victoria wrapped their purchases in Prada tissue paper, put them inside four large, snowy-white Prada shopping bags, and tied everything together with deep-blue Prada ribbon. She enclosed a note that read, "I wish you a magical time in New York City." Then she arranged for the packages to be sent to João and Maria at the Plaza Hotel. No rush, Victoria assured the delivery service. "They're not going anywhere."

About an hour and a half had passed since the couple had arrived, wanting nothing more than a jacket.

BEFORE the Prada store opened, in October, 1996, there was a stampede to work there, which reflected significant changes in retailing. For decades, it had been assumed that mak-



"There you are!"

ing good money in high-end retail depended on building a clientele: it might take a few years to create a million-dollar book (that is, a client list capable of generating a million dollars in sales), which the better specialty stores would reward with a six-figure salary. Now, thanks to the global publicity machine (from magazine ads to fashion shows on E!), everything happens more quickly: when a designer is hot, a good salesperson at a Madison Avenue boutique can make six figures right away. Though it isn't work for the long haul—no customer is more fickle than the boutique customer—the thinking among many young salespeople is: Hey, what is?

Anyway, there are other perks. The society ladies who over the years sought the advice of the famous Betty Halbreich at Bergdorf's kept her a secret from their closest friends. "I was their private possession," Halbreich says. But today, high-fashion sales associates, like hair colorists and personal masseuses, often frequent the same parties, restaurants, concerts, and sports events as their clients. "You start to mingle with certain people who can make it happen for you" is the way one salesperson put it. Caroline Bessette Kennedy, it has frequently been noted, got her start as a personal shopper at Calvin Klein.

Ideal sales associates have a facility in foreign languages and a sensitivity to foreign cultures, to be sure, but they are also experts in the unspoken lexicon of style. That doesn't mean just knowing the difference between European and American sizes, or the needs of a music-industry executive versus those of a Wall Street banker—that is a given. They also have to understand the different aesthetic between, say, a Rod Stewart type and a Puff Daddy type, both onstage and off. (Hint: The Gucci pony-hair coat goes on the latter.) Clothes produced by a hot designer may momentarily sell themselves, but it still takes someone truly gifted to talk a customer—even a very rich customer—into buying an outfit that costs as much as a car, and to do so over and over again.

To Prada's recruiters, who poached from all the best stores in New York, Victoria must have seemed perfect. She was born in Spain, and came from well-to-do, style-conscious parents: when she was a little girl, her clothes were custom-made, and her shoes and her handbags were always matched. Her mother taught her to be gracious and doting; her father, a crusading journalist, taught her to be persistent and compassionate. In the seventies, as the family moved from Spain to Central America and on to South America and then Florida, Victoria picked up four new languages—French, English, German, and Italian—along with the silent telegraphy of the privileged. Victoria left home at seventeen to become an actress, and, after moving to California, in the eighties, she appeared as an extra in "Little Nikita" and "Less Than Zero." But she was also enrolled in college and to support herself she took various service-oriented jobs: hotel concierge, translator, salesclerk, personal shopper.

Victoria found her calling at Saks Fifth Avenue in Beverly Hills. She loved the clothes made by the designer Joseph Abboud, and turned selling them into a personal mission. She talked him up to her rich clientele, held seminars to educate the staff about the collections, and even staged a fashion show and catered it herself. "I was like a celebrity," she says, adding, "There was nothing I could not sell." After almost a year at Saks, though, she grew restless, and requested a transfer to the Manhattan store. There she soon came to the attention of Prada's recruiters.

Victoria rebuffed them at first, but finally agreed to be interviewed. "I kept saying, 'I don't know the product,' " she remembers. "I was concerned that I would not fit the part." To make that point, she dressed for the interview in a bright-orange pants suit by Romeo Gigli, big gold earrings, and lots of makeup. The interviewer was encouraging but cautious. "I love your look," she told Victoria. "You're exotic and you can carry it. But when you're with Prada—well, I had to change my look, too." Victoria says, "I went home and thought, Naah, I don't want to work there."

But Prada kept calling, and the company was rumored to be paying some of the highest commissions in town. Victoria agreed to be interviewed a second time. The night before, she dressed herself in black—a black turtleneck, black pants, and black boots. She pulled her hair back off her face, and put on small diamond ear studs and clear lipstick. "I looked like a robot," she says. Two weeks later, she joined the Prada staff.

Victoria faced two daunting challenges in her new job. She knew virtually nothing about Prada, and what she did know she didn't understand. Her knowledge of menswear would take her only so far: Joseph Abboud never made anything in fabrics with names like techno gabardine or in colors with names like petroleo. Her old clientele couldn't help her, either, for most of her Saks customers had been strapping, all-American types, and Prada made little, if anything, for them. Like most boutiques, Prada's had no formal training program, so Victoria designed her own. She attached herself to the store's buyer and peppered him with questions that she imagined her customers would ask: "Why is this jacket so stretchy?" and "Why is this fabric so shiny?" and "Why does this tuxedo cost two thousand dollars?" She needed bits of Prada philosophy in order to start a dialogue with customers. The more Victoria studied, the more she believed that she had something to offer her new company. The store had opened, for instance, without enough black sports coats. "How do you open a store with no black coats?" she wondered. "This is a black town!" She offered suggestions, but Prada's managers weren't very interested. She didn't even bother to mention her idea that Prada add a baby stroller to its luggage line.

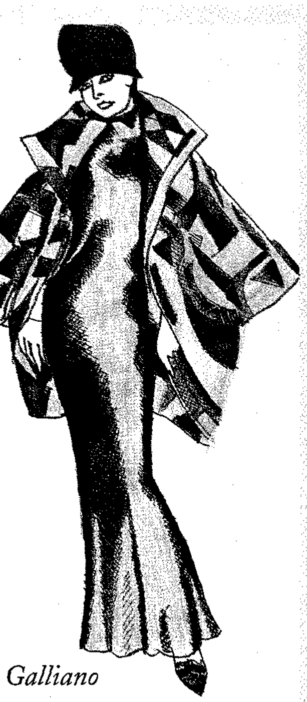
Victoria also knew that she didn't really understand the Prada customer. Going from Saks Fifth Avenue to Madison Avenue was a little like transferring from an excellent public school in a well-to-do neighborhood to a Swiss boarding school. In both cases, the students are smart and rich, but the latter are much more rarefied. Many Prada customers worked in art galleries or advertising, in the movies or television, in fashion or beauty—and what they wore had to communicate silently all sorts of messages about their sophistication and their taste. "They have an attitude," Victoria explains. "Otherwise, they wouldn't be here—they'd be intimidated by the salespeople."

All good salespeople are great recordkeepers, but Victoria was an exceptional

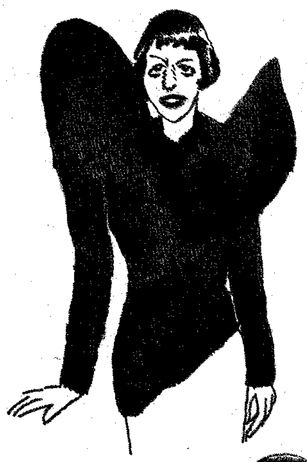
PARIS

BY MICHAEL ROBERTS

Balance was the key to the Paris collections. Comme des Garçons showed an unbalanced look of lopsided tops worn with half-finished skirts. Alexander McQueen's Givenchy collection was balanced somewhere between the aggressive kitsch of early Mugler and the kitsch aggression of Montana. And Junya Watanabe's clothes, of thick cloth with coiled wire extensions, worn by models crowned with plastic bags, were not so much unbalanced as unhinged. Later, Isabella Blow had a revelatory moment in Jeremy Scott's atelier. "It's a new kind of balance," she said, indicating the designer's twisted mink bolero, complete with inbuilt hump. Quite. But it was an old kind of Quasimodo. At Louis Vuitton, Marc Jacobs attempted a more delicate balance between American minimalism and French luxury, and at Chanel Karl Lagerfeld's balancing act consisted of topping and tailing his ankle-length collection with white hats and boots. The balance at Dior, however, tipped (as in "We just tipped these ghastly colors all over the clothes and thought, Why not?"), which may explain why pink, red, orange, yellow, and blue often fought it out over a single outfit. John Galliano, having lost his balance with that collection, regained it with his own—a "Cabaret"-style mise-en-scène with boys in feather boas. Not so Stella McCartney, at Chloé. She came up with suspect, unbuttoned clothes and precipitous heels, putting her reputation in the balance. After all, clothes that make a virtue out of looking easy can also make one look like a girl of easy virtue.

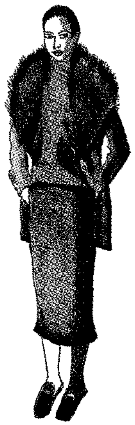


John Galliano

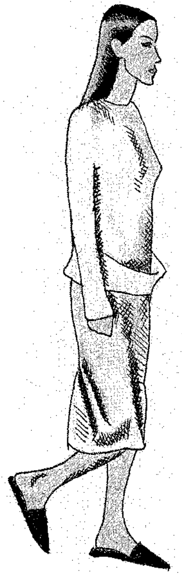


Jeremy Scott

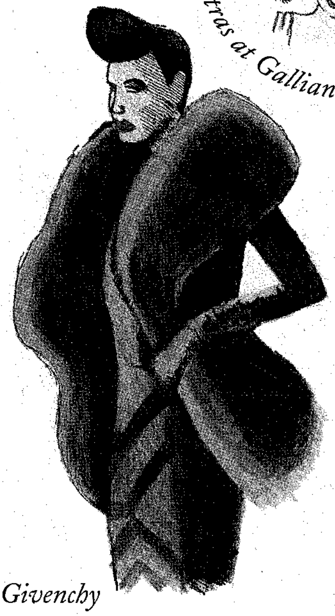
Extras at Galliano



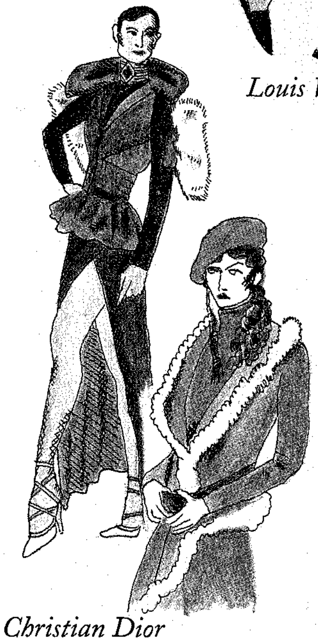
Céline



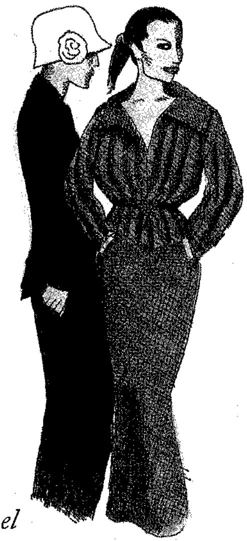
Louis Vuitton



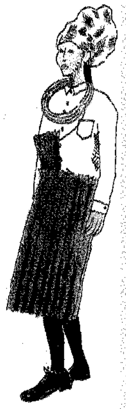
Givenchy



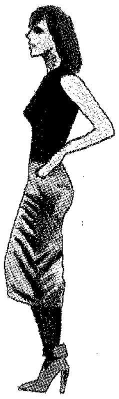
Christian Dior



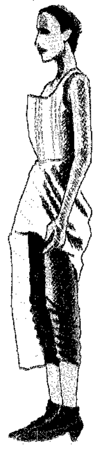
Chanel



Watanabe



Chloé



Comme des Garçons

one. She used this skill to cope with her new surroundings. She bought a loose-leaf binder and divided it into sections—one for time zones ("If you're in New York, don't call people in L.A. at 10 A.M."), and another for maps ("I've got customers from Zimbabwe. You'd better know where Zimbabwe is if you're gonna keep 'em"). She made calendars to keep track of her work hours, her appointments, her alterations, and her sales. She designed a client questionnaire that she could pass on to the buyer: it posed questions such as "Tell me what items you would like to see stocked at our store," and "What is it about Prada that you like best?" She put all this information on a small handheld computer, which she set to beep her on important dates like client birthdays. "In the beginning," Victoria told herself, "you build."

BECAUSE experience and abilities vary, commissions do, too—the same store can have a thirty-thousand-dollar-a-year salesperson and a salesperson who makes a hundred and thirty thousand—and resentment is common. A co-worker might "forget" to relay client messages or might put back on the racks clothing that was being held—moves that could easily cause a high-maintenance customer to move on. "There's a lot of jealousy" is all that Victoria will say. But if she wasn't immediately popular with her co-workers—they tended to roll their eyes when she bounded down the stairs, her arms laden with merchandise—she got emotional validation from her clients. "You change people's lives," she says. "Men come in and say, 'Help me.' They have no clue."

Victoria knew that trust was essential for building a client base: if she talked a customer into something that wasn't right, the customer would never come back. This is particularly true at Prada, where the wrong outfit can make a person look about as fashion-conscious as a high-school geometry teacher. "Maybe this is not the right collection for you," Victoria would sometimes say, or "That silhouette is supposed to be looser." She explains, "You never mention fat. A bad fit is always our fault." Sometimes Victoria didn't even try to sell clothes. "Prada is skinny, so you find other ways to make customers feel good about themselves," she says. "You can sell shoes, a purse, a bag."

In all retail, the secret of success is repeat business, which is very difficult to establish with trend-conscious buyers. Victoria, however, was determined to turn her new Prada clients into an ever-expanding circle of friends. She invited them to private sales, designing the invitations on her computer. ("As one of my guests you'll be able to take advantage of having the opportunity to shop before the sale is open to the rest of the world," she wrote.) She sent Halloween notes with candy and Christmas cards with homey drawings of Mrs. Claus. She illustrated a New Year's greeting with a little man washing a billboard clean, and wrote, "You always make me smile and I wanted to tell you how much I appreciate you." Victoria knew that her managers weren't keen on the corniness, but it was paying off. She had Asian clients who were spending more than a hundred thousand dollars a year.

At the same time, Victoria's California ease was being honed to a New York edge. She lived on the Upper East Side, dated a corporate lawyer, and went to the opera (sometimes phoning a client at intermission). She watched the stock market, not just to gauge her clients' moods but to keep an eye on her own investments. Her acting ambitions went on hold: when Steven Spielberg came into the store, she sold him a computer case and was only momentarily wistful when he left. That was probably because, at nine months into the job, Victoria was doing well. The company wanted her to go to Milan with the buyer to inspect the fall, 1997, collection.

Victoria made herself available to her customers by home phone, office

I'M WORKING ON THE WORLD

I'm working on the world,
revised, improved edition,
featuring fun for fools,
blues for brooders,
combs for bald pates,
tricks for old dogs.

Here's one chapter: The Speech
of Animals and Plants.
Each species comes, of course,
with its own dictionary.
Even a simple "Hi, there,"
when traded with a fish,
makes both the fish and you
feel quite extraordinary.

The long-suspected meanings
of rustlings, chirps, and growls!
Soliloquies of forests!
The epic hoots of owls!
Those crafty hedgehogs drafting
aphorisms after dark,
while we blindly believe
they're sleeping in the park!

Time (Chapter Two) retains
its sacred right to meddle
in each earthly affair.
Still, time's unbounded power
that makes a mountain crumble,
moves seas, rotates a star,

won't be enough to tear
lovers apart: they are
too naked, too embraced,
too much like timid sparrows.

Old age is, in my book,
the price that felons pay,
so don't whine that it's steep:
you'll stay young if you're good.
Suffering (Chapter Three)
doesn't insult the body.
Death? It comes in your sleep,
exactly as it should.

When it comes, you'll be dreaming
that you don't need to breathe;
that breathless silence is
the music of the dark,
and it's part of the rhythm
to vanish like a spark.

Only a death like that. A rose
could prick you harder, I suppose;
you'd feel more terror at the sound
of petals falling to the ground.

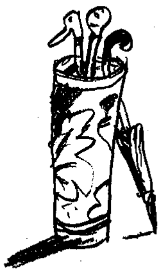
Only a world like that. To die
just that much. And to live just so.
And all the rest is Bach's fugue, played
for the time being
on a saw.

—Wislawa Szymborska

(Translated, from the Polish, by Stanislaw Baranczak and Clare Cavanagh.)

phone, voice mail, and beeper. She spoke almost every morning with a client in Miami, helping him decide what to put on. ("Every shoe, every sock is Prada," she explains. "He's a diehard. We love him.") She spent her free time dreaming up new ways to make her clients happy. When a Hollywood client couldn't get to New York in time to see the spring collection, she videotaped it for him, complete with voice-over. When Wayne Gretzky and his wife posed for a photo shoot in Franceso Scavullo's studio, Victoria went along as their stylist. When a fashion-industry customer was out of town during a sale, Victoria, who knew his taste because she had created it, just picked out five thousand dollars' worth of merchandise for him.

As her client list grew, so did the list of services she could provide. She could get tables at Jean Georges, because Jean-Georges Vongerichten shopped with her; she could pass on stock tips and could recommend decorators, because she had clients in those fields. Sometimes, when she was walking through a New York neighborhood to hand-deliver flowers to a client, she'd be surprised to realize how many of her customers lived so close to one another yet didn't know each other. The loneliness of some of them touched her. Once, she bought a customer a Teddy bear in a Prada-like leather jacket for his birthday. He burst into tears.



Still, there was nothing Victoria liked more than getting a good-looking man into the dressing room that first time. Men hated to shop, but Victoria knew how to make it easy and fun. One day, for instance, a handsome, dark-haired, blue-eyed man came in. He was wearing Polo—one of her managers, in fact, recognized him as a big spender at the Ralph Lauren store, up the street—but Victoria knew that Prada's more fitted cut would make him look sexier. She suggested that he relax in a dressing room, she brought him a drink, and then, in her words, "I just started bringing the whole house down." She brought suits, jackets, pants, shirts, ties, belts—the works. "Stop! Stop!" he finally had to tell her, but he bought virtually everything she had showed him. The man was the advertising mogul Donny Deutsch, and from then on he bought Prada exclusively. "She turned me from a fashion victim into a fashion victim squared," he says. Victoria reserves the store's large private dressing room for him—the room Leonardo DiCaprio and Sigourney Weaver use—and they essentially play dress-up. "I'm like the Pretty Woman," she said. Prada cosseted the body, Victoria cosseted the soul. Having her around was like having a mother and a lover at the same time—at the client's convenience, of course.

VICTORIA was thrilled to see Prada's spring, 1998, collection, because customers had been calling and begging her for pieces of it weeks before it arrived. It cheered her to see winter's navy blues, grays, and blacks replaced by pale-blue and raspberry shades; she much preferred the new boat necks to the stiff, cold-weather collars. She was particularly enchanted with the soft kangaroo-skin loafers, which had a jaunty, splayed toe. Victoria did have one brief moment of panic, when a client put on a pair of pants that were way too short. "Oh, my God," she said. "I brought you something that's already been altered." Then she remembered that it was the new cut.

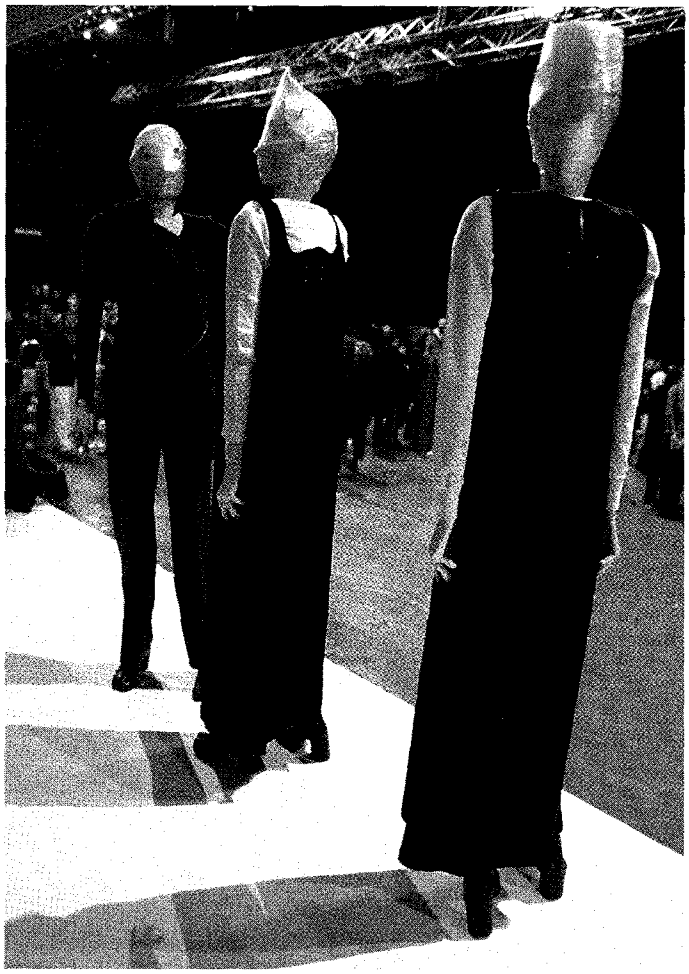
Victoria was heading back to Milan for another buying trip, and would then fly on to Japan as the guest of a grateful client. She'd recently been chosen Salesperson of the Year at the Madison Avenue store, and was up for a promotion. She loved her job, and wouldn't change it for anything. "You have to readjust your thinking," she said. "You have to be what the collection is. It's about reinventing yourself. That's fashion." ♦

AT THE ATELIERS

THE CRAZY PROFESSOR

Why was Paris persuaded that the radical Martin Margiela was right for the venerable house of Hermès?

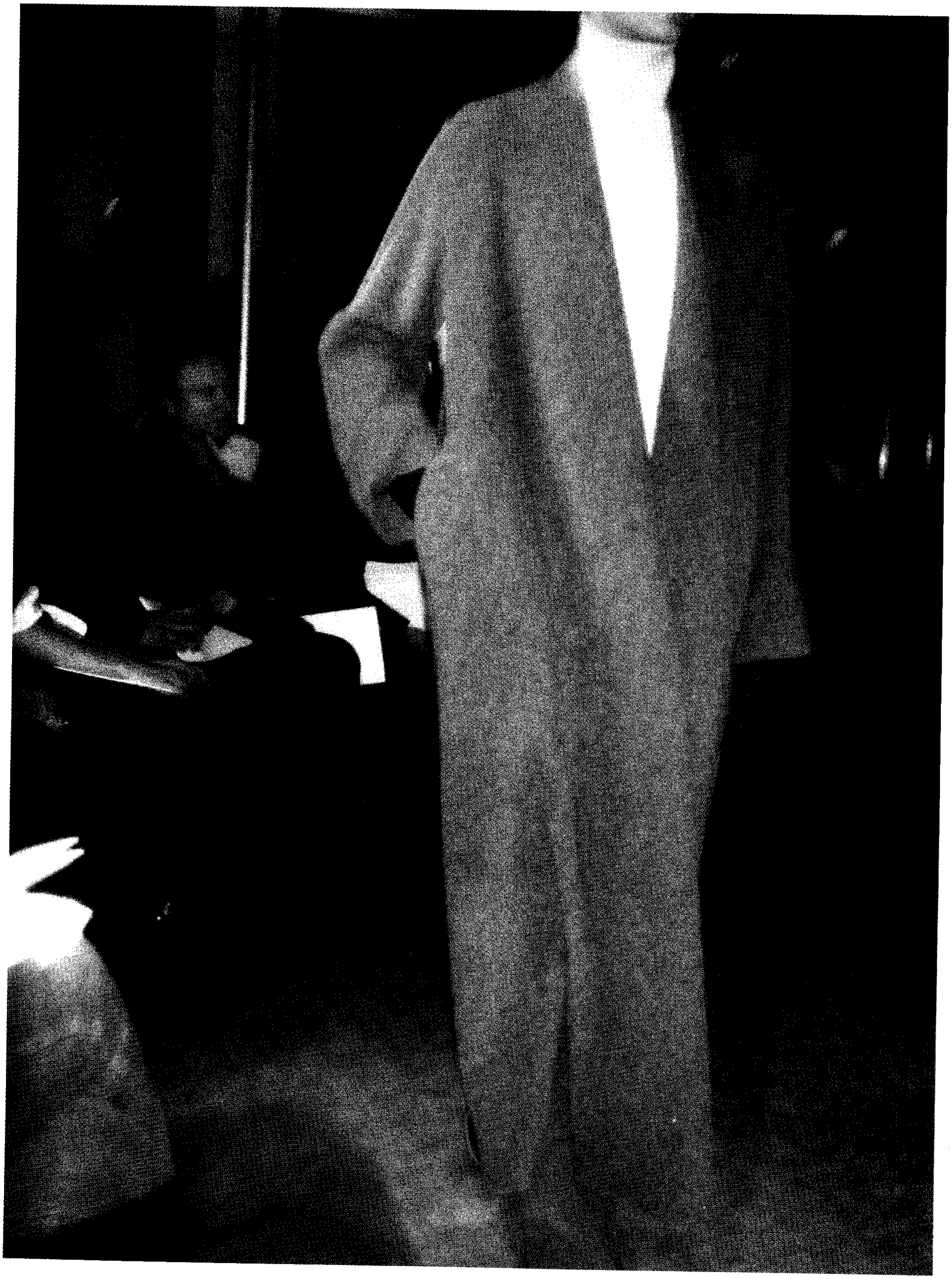
BY REBECCA MEAD



On the third floor of the Hermès Building, at 24 Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, in Paris, is the Hermès museum, which can be visited only by appointment. Tourists hoping to see old Kelly bags, preferably bags previously owned by Grace Kelly herself, will be disappointed: the collection consists of quirky paraphernalia, whose governing theme is what the museum's curator, Menehould de Bazelaire, refers to as "the 'oss"—ornate old saddles, whips, and bridles, and glass cases filled with gruesome-looking spurs. The museum is frequently explored by Hermès designers seeking inspiration, including, in recent months, Martin Margiela, the new designer of Hermès's ready-to-wear for women, whose much anticipated first collection was to be shown in March, six weeks after my visit. He had been particularly interested in examining a coachman's jacket dating from the eighteenth century, Mme. de Bazelaire recalled; but to her mind there were other objects that seemed more in keeping with his style. She reached into a glass case and drew out an old pharmacist's bottle that was filled with a murky substance and was labelled "*L'huile de pied de bœuf*"—used to polish saddles. "Very Martin Margiela," she observed dryly.

Last April, Jean-Louis Dumas-Hermès, whose great-great-grandfather Thierry Hermès founded the saddle-making company, in 1837, shocked the fashion world with his appointment of Margiela. The forty-one-year-old Belgian designer has a famously *l'huile-de-pied-de-bœuf* aesthetic: in the late eighties, when other houses were presenting pouf skirts, Margiela would drag fashion editors out to a rubble-strewn wasteland in one of Paris's poorest immigrant neighborhoods, where models with white paint around their eyes paraded in peculiar jackets with seams on the outside and long, drab, sacklike skirts made from unhemmed lining materials. Margiela was tagged a deconstructionist: he became known for reconstituting flea-market castoffs, like old ball gowns worn over secondhand

THIS PAGE: ZHANG HAI'ER; OPPOSITE: MICHAEL ROBERTS



Clothes from Margiela's first collection for Hermès, and, opposite, from his own line.

denim jeans and men's suit jackets reconfigured and worn back to front by women. Margiela's clothes were highbrow and conceptual, and unobservant of trends: he made jackets from tacked-together toile of the kind used for garment prototypes, and he created tunics from dressmaker's dummies, on which flimsy drapes of black chiffon were fastened—garments in the style of garments in progress.

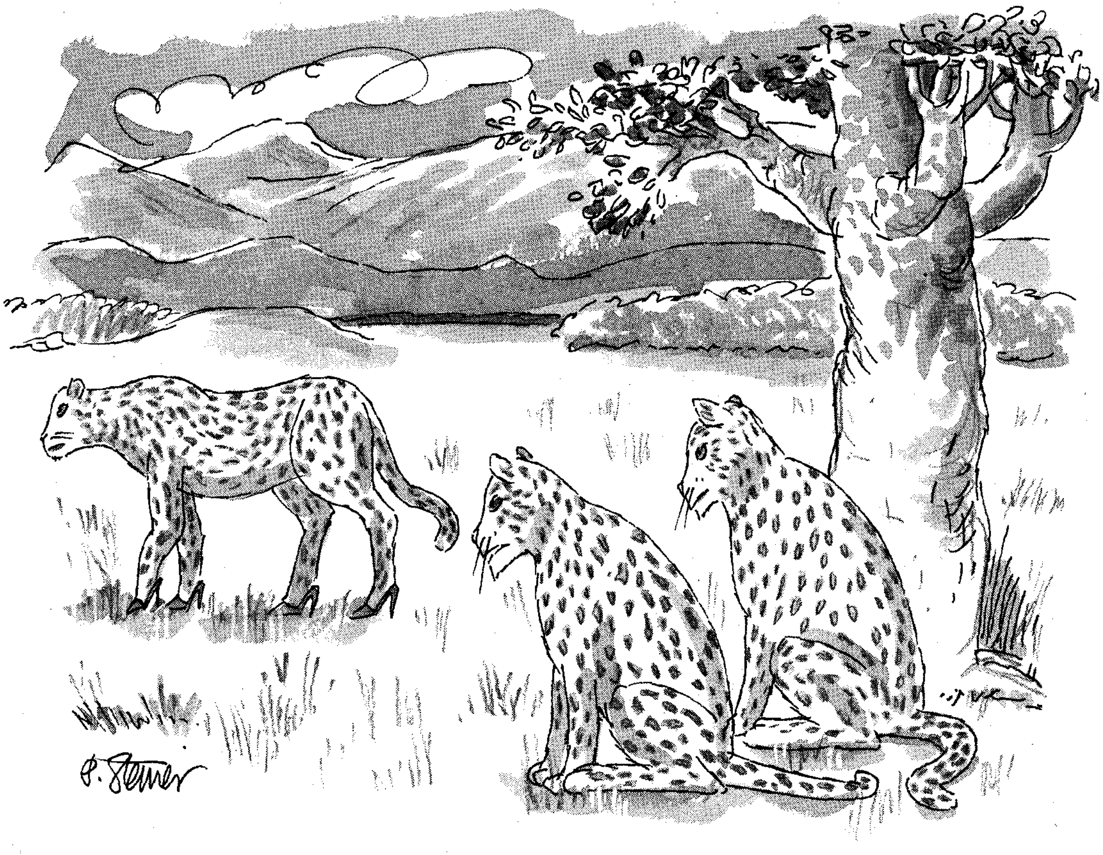
Hiring Margiela for Hermès, a producer of traditional high-end goods nonpareil, looked like fashion gone even madder than usual. His appointment appeared to be the implosive end point of the recent rush of controversial changes in the French fashion business whereby innovative young designers have been brought in to head up the venerable old couture houses. "Conservative luxury will meet with grunge" is how the Associated Press's Paris correspondent described the marriage at the time. The buyers at the hundred and sixty Hermès stores around the world were in a flap: ready-to-wear makes up thirteen per cent of revenues, and sales have been good, particularly in the United States, where they doubled last year. "Hermès is Hermès," a saddened French saleswoman in the New York store told me when I asked what she thought about the hiring of Margiela. "Why do they want to change it? It's timeless."

But by the time the Paris couture shows came around, in January, the conventional wisdom was that Dumas was a visionary: bringing Margiela to Hermès was obvious. When I visited Dumas, a bright-eyed sixty-year-old, in his pink-painted loftlike office above the Hermès store, he acknowledged the potential hazards of the appointment. "It is a new energy into the Hermès engine, the volcano," he said. "The only interest I have in Hermès is tomorrow—the period to come, not the period that ends. Some of our customers will be shocked." But fashion people in Paris were eagerly anticipating the new collection. "Margiela loves complication, which is why he is always presenting his stuff as the end result of some theory," Joan Juliet Buck, the editor of French *Vogue*, explained. "His entire creative process is about making the patterns and then tearing them apart, and that really dovetails with the main concern of the house of Hermès, which is about how things are made—the genius contained in craftsmanship."

In the United States, fashion is increasingly part of the entertainment industry, but French fashion carries a heavier cultural weight, as it has done since Louis XIV institutionalized the dressmaking industry to insure that Paris would remain the world's resource for couture. "We have wine, and we have the Concorde, and we have the TGV, and we have fashion," Alice Morgaine, the former editor of the defunct fashion magazine *Jardin des Modes*, told me. But the French feel perpetually besieged: that fashion is in crisis has been a constant theme in Paris for decades. The current threat is seen to be the growing internationalization of fashion, in which traditional French skills of craftsmanship are valued less than skills of marketing, which are the strengths of the Americans and those eternal fashion enemies of France, the Italians. (Christian Lacroix, one of the more established couturiers, recently compared American design to *Reader's Digest*, then swiftly and somewhat unconvincingly announced that the comment should not be understood as a criticism.)

In this context, Margiela's untrendiness, reclusiveness, and obsessive attention to structure are viewed as comfortingly French. And his match with Hermès, whose signature orange box is an incontrovertible icon of the national culture, was seen as an occasion for patriotism. Olivier Zahm, the co-editor of the avant-garde French magazine *Purple Fashion*, says, "Margiela will come back to the roots of Hermès, and rediscover what is in the genetic code of this *maison*. Even if he is Belgian, he brings so much to Paris and the French identity. He will show us what Hermès is, deeply."

THE rightness of the match between the houses of Hermès and Margiela is enticingly plausible until you get into a taxi



"I say one or the other. But leopardskin and heels is too much."

and actually go from one establishment to the other, and then try to imagine an Hermès matron making the same journey. To get to Margiela's atelier from the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, you drive out of the so-called golden triangle of expensive boutiques and into Paris's northern hills—through the unreconstructed red-light district of Pigalle, past the derelict buildings of the Boulevard de la Chapelle, and over a bundle of railway lines. On a run-down back street is the building occupied by Margiela, which was once a repair shop for the French railways. Inside and out, it is warehouse-rough: in a high, loftlike space, a balcony level of glass-fronted offices looks down onto a selling floor, while Margiela's design studio is hidden another flight of stairs higher. This is where Margiela creates his own line, which he shows separately from his clothes for Hermès. An atmosphere of quasi-cultish industry is enhanced by the white lab coats that many of Margiela's twenty staff wear while they work—a borrowing from the tradition of the couture ateliers, and one that is especially useful when it comes to, say, slapping white latex paint onto old pairs of denim jeans that have been pinned to boards like dead butterflies, which is what one serious-looking young man was doing when I was there.

Margiela came to Paris fourteen years ago to become an assistant to Jean-Paul Gaultier, having graduated from the Royal Academy of Arts in Antwerp, which was also the seeding ground for Ann Demeulemeester, Dries Van Noten, and the clutch of other designers who became known, terrorist-organization style, as the Antwerp Six. In Antwerp, Margiela had attracted the attention of a boutique owner named Jenny Meirens, and in 1988 the two established La Maison Martin Margiela. Margiela's staff tend to use the first-person plural when they talk about the designer. "We do not use my physical form or my personality to promote our work. I prefer to place a priority on the time I spend as a designer rather than as a publicist," Margiela said to me via fax, the only medium in which he will be interviewed. Margiela's reputation as the crazy professor of fashion is enhanced by a long-held refusal on his part to speak to the press or allow himself to be photographed.

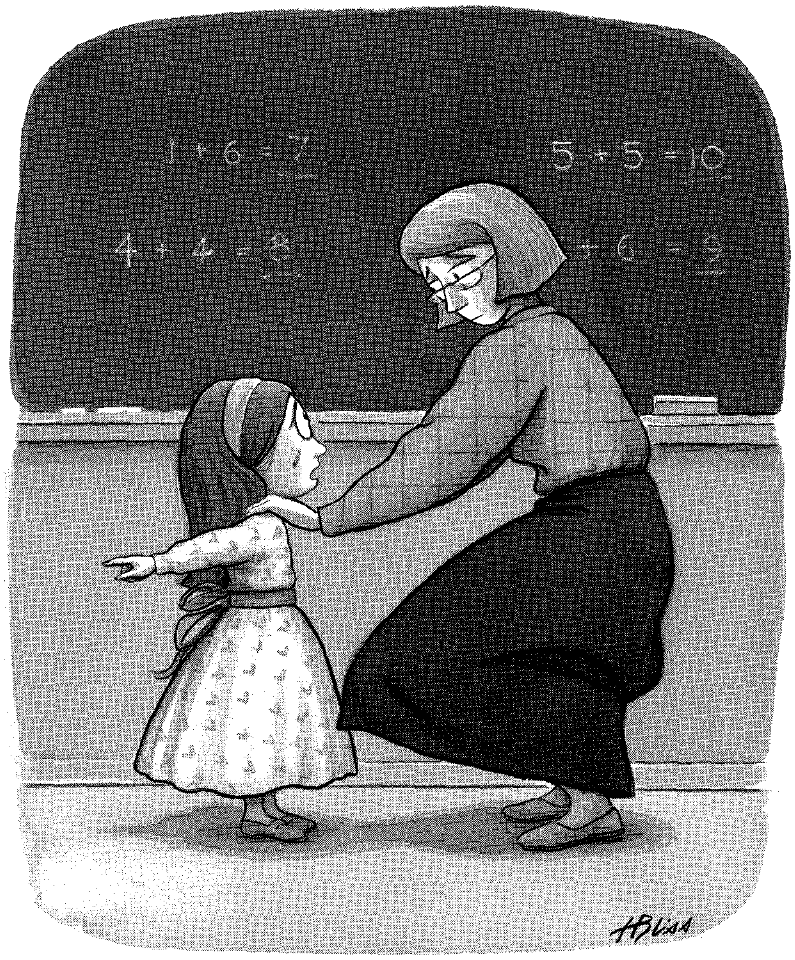
"Half empty, please."

• •

His appearance is, in fact, unremarkable. I saw him wander into a colleague's office, and recognized him by a leather cap that an Hermès executive, in a moment of indiscretion, had told me he always wears: in a dark zippered jacket and jeans, he was tall and slim, with graying hair pulled back into a short, curling ponytail, sideburns, and a shadow of beard on his square-jawed face. He has not spoken with the press in recent years, in part, friends of his say, because of wounded feelings. In 1989, his decision to show his collection in a playground in an impoverished neighborhood caused the newspaper *Libération* to accuse him of exploiting poor children for perverse aesthetic effect. Olivier Zahm says, "He is upset with the press, which always presents him as an 'artist' who does unwearable clothes." (That view of Margiela is not entirely unjustified: last year, a museum in Rotterdam gave him a solo show in which he collaborated with a microbiologist to display a number of garments overgrown with vividly colored bacterial mold.) There may be a more strategic rationale for Margiela's unavailability as well. "I am sure he knows that not wanting to be visible is the best way to be visible," Zahm says.

Margiela's fax persona, which declines to answer any personal questions, is by turns good-natured, pedagogical, disengaged, and resolutely unreflective: Why does he show his clothes in such unconventional settings? "We wish to be free to bring the clothes we propose each season into an atmosphere in keeping with how we view their spirit and role and that which stimulates us as a team." What is the place of haute couture today? "Maintain techniques and a 'know-how' that might otherwise die away. Propose clothing in as artisan a way as possible. Avail of many techniques in the production of one-off garments that can not apply to the more industrial process that proves most of what we wear day-to-day."

On being asked why he was unwilling to offer interpretations of his own clothing, Margiela faxed, "Ultimately it is the reaction of the person who will be wearing a certain piece to that garment that matters." In declining to explain his clothes, of course, Margiela promotes much more theorizing than he would if he simply came out and said, "It's all about a woman who's not afraid to show her individuality" or "It's all about tunics held together with ribbons," or some other typical designer-speak. If Margiela had been visible as he answered, he surely would be poker-faced. "Is it really you, Martin Margiela, answering these questions, or is someone else doing it for you?" I asked. "What about 'with' instead of 'for'?" came the



"Caroline Dolnick said my dress is a knockoff!"

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reply. "In the same way that a jacket that I design is the final result of the work of many people, our and my answers to questions such as those you pose are the result of my work in collaboration with that of the team I have built with my associate Jenny Meirens."

Some people suspect that Meirens is responsible for Margiela's policy of elusiveness. While I was visiting the atelier, Meirens, a blond woman in her fifties, wandered in and stood nearby, pointedly not introducing herself. When I told her who I was and complimented her on the collection, she smiled slightly and said, "He's a clever guy. We are very lucky," before gliding silently away.

"From what I understand, she directs the politics of the organization, but at the same time she is trying to protect his vision," said Barbara Weiser, the co-owner of Charivari, the cutting-edge New York boutique, and an early Margiela supporter. In 1994, Weiser hosted a presentation of Margiela's fall collection and Margiela attended it, although he would not talk to any of the reporters who had been invited. "At some point, I felt as if we were working on the atomic bomb," she said. "The amount of secrecy that was involved went way beyond anything that made any sense." My faxed exchange with Margiela provided occasional illumination: "What do you consider sexy in a woman?" "Self-knowledge." "What do you consider your greatest achievement?" "Continuity." But more often there was willful opacity, the form of an answer without the content. "What does working for Hermès offer you that you didn't have before?" I asked. Margiela faxed back, "The occasion to work with Hermès and their team."

On January 24th, a dinner was held in the Hermès store to inaugurate the "Year of the Tree." Every year, Jean-Louis Dumas concocts a theme to inspire his artisans and designers. (Last year it was Africa, and the year before that it was music.) "Hermès is something that can use the metaphor of the tree," he announced over champagne. "This year it is quite clear, with the new idea of Martin Margiela. For us, it is the year of the sap, the year of advent and innovation."

Margiela's reclusiveness seems to suit Dumas, whose own idiosyncratic theatricality is thrown further into relief by it. For the dinner, the store had been transformed into a kitsch pseudo-woodland: floors were covered with a thick layer of bark and wood chips; dining tables were edged with moss and sprinkled with olive-tree leaves, from among which an occasional spider would emerge. Figures in animal masks wandered around wordlessly and a flutist appeared, piping winsomely. During dessert, a troupe of young women dressed in white came in and pranced about to madrigal music, while Dumas, baldish and wearing a brown cashmere suit, sat grinning throughout. The whole thing was entirely unfabulous; it was like being trapped in a production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" directed by David Lynch.

Dumas, who has run Hermès since 1978, with great success, is very proud of his own creative side: the Hermès magazine, *Le Monde d'Hermès,* regularly features sketches and diary entries from a notebook he always carries. "I do it the old way," he explained. "Everything that is signed 'Hermès' is signed with my O.K. I say it is the old way because now, with so many companies being acquired by conglomerates, there is a man representing the management and someone else being the artist. An old name I could drop is M. de Givenchy. Believe me, he knew what numbers were, and he knew what a line was."

In the nineteen-thirties, Émile Hermès began to transform the family company from a saddlery into a luxury-accessories business, producing belts, gloves, bags, and silks, and in the fifties his son-in-law, Robert Dumas, turned it into a shopping destination for the likes of Grace Kelly and the Duke and Duchess of Windsor. Now, with Margiela, Jean-Louis Dumas is pushing it still further in the direction of fashion. "There is a momentum," Dumas said. "You will come to Hermès to buy a dress the same way that years ago you came only to buy a scarf."

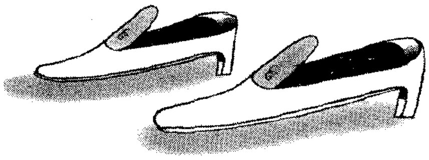
There are sound financial reasons for taking this direction, according to Cedric Magnelia, an analyst at Crédit Suisse First Boston in London. "The Japanese, especially tourists, account for half, if not more, of all luxury-goods sales," I was told by Magnelia. "And as the Japanese economy sputters, as you squeeze that clientele for all it is worth, sooner or later you have to go somewhere else." Ready-to-wear is more commonly bought by residents in local markets than by tourists, and in local markets there is still room for growth. Focussing on the clothes, according to Magnelia, "also allows Hermès to put a little bit of splash into the brand and attract a younger clientele."

Putting splash in the brand is, says Jean-Louis Dumas, precisely not what he is aiming to do. Margiela, he told me, "is just another member joining our team." Dumas had come to know of Margiela's work through his daughter, an actress who once modelled for the designer, and Dumas invited him to lunch at his home in early 1997. "He had a few but very well-thought-out observations about Hermès," Dumas recalled. "He mentioned ease, he mentioned comfort, he mentioned quality, he mentioned time: the feeling—and these are my words, not his—that it took time, and that it will give back time. And the feeling that clothes are objects to wear. The second step was that our studio people at Pantin"—the Hermès workshop, outside Paris—"met Margiela and his assistants. And right away he was a good rider for a good horse." Dumas says he was decisive: "I only thought of Martin Margiela. I didn't ask around as if I were a circus owner trying to find a clown."

If there is a circus owner in Paris fashion, it is Bernard Arnault, who, as the head of Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton, controls seven fashion houses. More than anyone else, Arnault has been responsible for the spectacular drama of haute couture in the past couple of years, with the installation of John Galliano, the mustachioed, effulgently romantic British designer, initially at Givenchy and then at Dior, which was followed, in 1996, by the appointment at Givenchy of Alexander McQueen, who was then a raucous twenty-seven-year-old Londoner best known for the innovative "bumster" pants. Arnault's drafting of the Americans Marc Jacobs for Louis Vuitton, Narciso Rodriguez for Loewe, and Michael Kors for Céline have further infused new life into Paris fashion. Arnault's activities are seen as exciting but also as disturbing—not because he is hiring foreigners (Paris fashion has always depended on outsiders, from Worth to Saint Laurent to Lagerfeld) but because he is so good at American-style marketing and merchandising.

Dumas insists that his appointment of Margiela is not intended to serve as a media coup in the LVMH manner, and he goes into a deadpan routine at the mention of his luxury-luggage rival: "Louis Vuitton—what are they? You mean the luggage-maker? Yes, what about them?" There are, after all, arguments against splash. The disdain with which Gucci is now regarded by some members of the fashion crowd who a few seasons ago were breathlessly praising Tom Ford's slithery frocks is a cautionary tale in overexposure (though Gucci's sinking stock price probably has more to do with the Asian financial crisis than with Ford's doing too many magazine interviews). Hermès, Dumas argues, has always been a place of innovation—in 1922, the company introduced the zipper to France—but it has become saddled with an undeserved reputation for conservatism. Hiring Margiela gives Dumas the opportunity to demonstrate what he contends is the company's essential radicalism.

Some at Hermès have a different view, among them Bertrand de Courcy, who does public relations for the workshops at Pantin. When I visited, he strode among the artisans with his hands in his pockets, rattling off facts such as which parts of a crocodile are used in a ten-thousand-dollar Kelly bag (the tail with its larger scales for the bottom of the bag and the belly for its front and back). At the end of the tour, I asked why he had skipped showing me where the Hermès clothes are made. M. de Courcy didn't really answer, but he gave me a look indicating that he felt fashion designers could not be trusted with the Hermès standards of criticism and taste, and then started huffing about the extravagances of John Galliano and Jean-Paul Gaultier. "Making dresses for men!" he said, rolling his eyes. "Who can wear that?" Margiela, clearly, was not expected to be any more sensible.



In Margiela's chilly atelier, I had tried on a series of garments from his archive. The earliest jacket, from his first collection, was highly mannered, with external seams and what Margiela calls "the cigarette shoulder"—a cigar-shaped roll of fabric placed halfway along the collarbone, creating a vividly narrow shoulder—the opposite of the eighties power silhouette. Ten years old, it remains surprising yet far less strange than it once was, its innovations having been absorbed and disseminated by newer designers. From the 1996 "photoprint" collection there was a long duster coat in light, almost transparent rayon, on which had been printed a full-size photograph of a man's winter coat; putting it on felt like participating in a marvellously clever prank while also wearing something exquisite. There was Margiela's 1991 "sock sweater," a pullover made from Army socks stitched together like so many animal pelts, and a jacket from his 1994 "doll" collection. For this line, the clothes of a pair of Barbie- and Ken-type dolls were blown up to human size, preserving all the distortions of proportion and the shortcuts of doll-tailoring, which resulted in supremely unflattering garments, an ugly fashion in-joke.

Margiela makes clothes that are about clothes. Unlike designers who are inspired by the dress of another era or another culture—Yves Saint Laurent's 1976 Ballets Russes collection or Christian Lacroix's enduring interest in the folk clothes of Arles, say—Margiela is fascinated by the structural conventions of clothes, and the perpetual, even obsessive theme of his work is to question those conventions. He works on themes repeatedly, and will often keep a garment, unaltered, in the collection season after season. One year, he offered no new clothes, and simply gathered all his favorite pieces from previous collections, dyed gray. Charivari's Weiser says, "He reminds me a bit of Yohji Yamamoto, who takes parts of a piece and wonders what makes that thing a collar and what makes that thing a cuff and what happens when you rearrange those pieces." Margiela's spring collection includes a series of flat garments inspired by the shape of plastic supermarket shopping bags, the governing conceit being that the seams are cut so that the clothes can lie completely flat, like folded handkerchiefs. (He showed this collection by having men in white coats carry the clothes around on hangers.) The results are ingenious and also extremely peculiar, with the arms and shoulders of sweaters and jackets displaced forward, thereby creating an in-built shrug. ("Why? *Why?*" a British designer at one of the big fashion houses sighed when I told him about Margiela's flat collection.)

But the offbeat clothes do sell. "Every season those special pieces become collector's pieces," Weiser says. Margiela's acolytes perform their own analyses of the clothes. "He is using the shape and function of the shopping bag—when you open the shopping bag and have a hole in it, then you have a garment," Olivier Zahm explained. "It is also a reference to capitalism, and there is certainly a political message in this, which is to be aware of not throwing everything away."

That clothes are ever about anything is, of course, a very French notion. With the exception of Japan, where conceptualism is also highly valued, in no other country would you find clothing that is designed to look most interesting when it is not being worn. "In French fashion, the idea is that you have to know what the quirky detail is referring to," Anne Hollander, the art historian and fashion critic, says somewhat wearily. "It may look ugly, but it is a sign, which you ought to be understanding—unlike Italian clothes, which just look good and feel good."

So in Paris, part of Margiela's appeal is that what might appear to Anglo-Saxon eyes as pretentiousness—his reticence, his inconveniently located fashion shows, his anonymous models, the invariability of his silhouette—is also a code to be read. Just as the designer's jackets deconstruct the conventions of tailoring, his eccentricities dismantle the conventions of the fashion industry: the hype and the artifice and the built-in obsolescence.

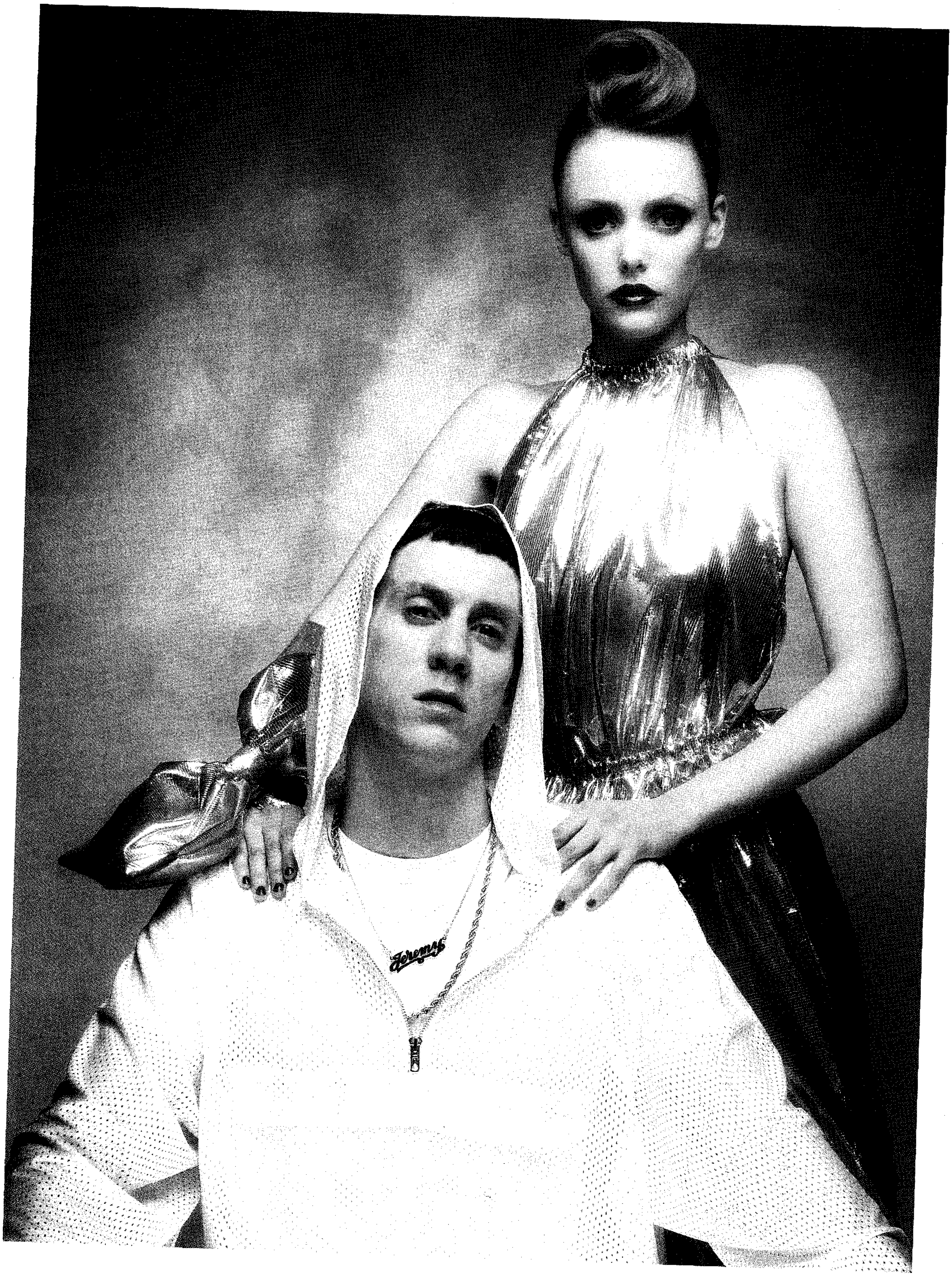
WHEN Margiela's collection for Hermès was finally shown two weeks ago, in a low-key presentation in the Hermès store, it delivered, in its luxurious, whispering way, a sharp critique of late-twentieth-century fashion. The gold "H"-shaped buckles, the bold blouses, the twin sets, and the stand-up-straight tailoring were gone. Instead, Margiela sent out a series of serene, smiling, mostly older women, who wandered between the glass cases of bags and scarves wearing long, unstructured layers of cashmere and deerskin and high-tech synthetics: sweeping camel coats under gauzy rainproof dusters; tunics in gray cashmere or brown leather, their V necks plunging to the waist. Margiela's experiments in structure during the past ten years were distilled into garments that could actually be reconfigured: a long silk-lined coat could be turned into a cape by tucking the arms inside; the V-necked tunic could be shrugged off the shoulders and worn tied around the waist, like a Japanese obi; the seamless sweaters could be worn inside out. Allusions to the classic Hermès look were subtle and minimal—the hem of a silk blouse was hand-rolled, like the edge of the scarves; the thread on the six-holed buttons was cross-stitched to form a discreet "H." Margiela had not committed the violence that some had expected (Suzy Menkes, writing in the *International Herald Tribune*, said that she missed the "angry" Margiela), but the clothes were quietly subversive. Stripped of all ostentation, they were to be valued from the inside, even if the wearer risked drabness. Margiela's clothes for Hermès were easier to understand than his own fall collection, which was shown the following night in a massive, hangarlike space underground at La Défense, where he sent life-size marionettes onto his catwalk wearing what looked like upside-down zippered sweaters from which one arm dangled, dresses onto which plastic wrap was seemingly ironed, and more flat garments. But the designer's work for Hermès nonetheless demanded thoughtfulness, a renunciation of the usual markers of luxury.

After the models had quietly shown the clothes, Jean-Louis Dumas approached me, smiling. He grabbed my wrist and swept me up the central marble staircase and pointed to a framed black-and-white photograph of a man with a toothbrush-neat white mustache. "This is my father," he said. Above, there were portraits of Dumas's grandfather, his great-grandfather, and his great-great grandfather. He said, "I walk past each time, and see my father, and he says, 'What new stupid thing are you doing now?' But it is not a revolution, what we are doing here. It is the true Hermès revealed." Back in January, Dumas had made it clear that he knew intellectual effort was required in order to see that the marriage between Hermès and Margiela made sense—and that it was a good thing if fashion still required thought. "I am not telling you that everything will be fine," he had said then, suddenly urgent, leaning forward on his elbows. "I don't sleep well, because I hope and I fear that it will be different. I am not asking Margiela to be non-Margiela. And if people are curious it is because they cannot see how, as we say in French, you marry fire and water. We'll see." ♦

GOLDEN BOY

If Harmony Korine, the director of "Gummo," did a remake of Robert Altman's "Prêt à Porter," it would be about the fashion designer Jeremy Scott and how a scrawny, acne-faced pup with ratty clothes, gold rapper-style teeth, and a Molly Bloom-meets-Valley-Girl-meets-Truman-Capote verbal style got to be one of the most talked-about young talents in Paris. The film would begin with Scott's Kansas City childhood (his first fashion memory: a red satin jacket from K mart) and follow him to Paris, in 1995, where he would explain his first collection, inspired by car-crash victims, thus: "I like the idea of this woman in a car accident, all chic'ed out in, like, a paper dress, like, couture and pleated, and totally, like, sexy. Instead of being, like, dowdy—like, hospital." The director would show the twenty-four-year-old Scott in his shabby, mattress-on-the-floor apartment, where he would devote himself to "luxury avant-garde": making violently asymmetrical mink boleros that would earn the attention of Donatella Versace and Mariano Puig, the president of Nina Ricci. Finally, the movie would end with the designer leaping onstage after his fall 1998 all-gold-lamé collection and screeching, to the snooty bemusement of some fashion editors, "Vive l'avant-garde!"

Photograph by Sean Ellis


Jeremy

FICTION

THE MASTER'S LAST DANCING

A wild party in Paris, inspired by one of Ford Maddox Ford's.

BY MARY BUTTS

THE time has now come when we can look back on parties. There have been so many parties. There will always be parties. Parties are going on now. At this instant there are people just recovered from the party of last night, and there are people looking round their house, kitchen, castle, flat, bed-sitting room, drawing room, studio, and saying, "Is everything ready? They'll be here soon." At the same moment there are people saying, "I must go and change," or dress or tidy myself, put on a clean collar, makeup, or wash, and asking for their sword, dickey, clean white waistcoat, mask or fan, for spurs, furs, cuffs, ruffs, silver shoes or sabots with a daisy painted on each tip. They are all going to a party. How often on leaving their homes have they glanced round and reminded themselves that when they return, drunk or sober, good tired or bad tired, sweetened toward life or embittered, better friends with the people they are going to meet or the reverse, the place will not look the same again. Not quite—however thankful we are to see it, or tired or excited. A change will have come over it because we left it to go to a party. It is the great chance for Something to Happen. We may come back in love, or out of it—in love with one's mistress, with a stranger, with humanity, one's kinsman, or with one's host, or with the salon curtains or the cloakroom cat. Or, best of all, in love with one's society, with the life of the world, with what the party has done to us.

The time has also come when one must say that parties are not what they were, and when, the first glad rush of participation spent, one no longer says, "I must give a party at once," or "I never want to go to a party again." But memories of parties enter the mind, murmur along, and now and then one of them rises like a colored bubble and makes one smile, winks out on the memory screen as another succeeds it.

Finally, there was the new crowd that began to arrive, and we did not quite know what to do with them. We were forced to explore the tricky half generation younger than ourselves, for if they were raw we were not yet quite ripe. Besides, we were the War lot. We had a secret. Something that they couldn't guess at and didn't want to, didn't believe in, whose mothers had been only wangling enough sugar for them while we— Anyhow, when they were not politely incredulous about our war, they resented our secret, are resenting it at this moment. That has a way of hurting, is likely to make one contemptuous by way of protection, or sometimes really bitter and wholly aloof. It is most unfair. One is thankful that those born after us are having a youth normal and proper to human beings. Nor are we exactly proud of ours, we who know that there is a line to describe us, which says, "*God help us, for we knew the worst too young.*" Nonetheless, I would rather sit next to any elderly soldier and hear him say that the Germans and only the Germans were to blame for what was handed out to us in 1914 than suffer the "don't bore me" attitude of his grandson.

This is the complaint of the neither-old-nor-young until one remembers that there was once little to complain of. Little in comparison with the adorable fun. For there is or was this blessedness about parties: that, like a moon dial, they only count the hours when the night sky is clear and lit. Almost always—for there have been Awful Parties, outstanding for some catastrophe, or that started something that should never have been begun and will never come to an end. The happy party indeed should have no history, no more than makes for agreeable gossip next day, parties that flash by like dancing lightning, leaving only bright heat behind.

Not like the one that this story is about. For some seasons parties had been getting wilder and wilder. I do not suggest that that evening was a culmination, that since that night they have not been getting madder and madder. But this one was as much as most of us could stand. As one of a series, it was never repeated.

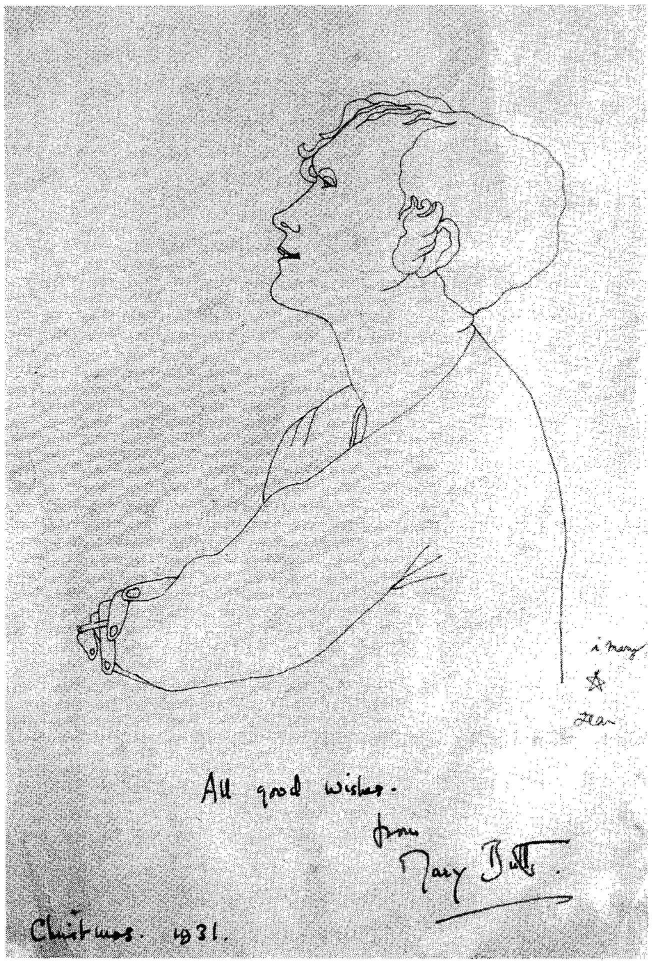
It happened in Paris, where everything happens. Its beginning had been a good idea, when, a year before, a celebrated English painter and his wife had hired for their friends to dance in, one night in each week, a tiny café the workmen patronized, in a remote, magical, hardly known quarter, among trees. Here and there in Paris one finds a village, packed tight on a little hill. The luck that follows love had led them to this, with its dancing beside a tiny square, whose *patron* was willing to hire it and let the young ladies and gentlemen do what they pleased. I can see it now. A small place, panelled in varnished wood, with its bar at the entrance, and harsh drinks in coarse glasses, and, inside, the little raised dancing floor with a minute balcony high on one wall, no more than a cage, where the drummer sat. He was a wisp of a man, but his drum was huge, and beside him a gross giant swung a concertina like a giant caterpillar across his chest and tossed it, squealing over the rails, above our heads. There was no room up on the wall for more than those two, but I remember, from time to time, a shriek that cut across their tune, and made us all spin and throw ourselves about, and that it came from a body I could not see and a head I could just see, between the shoulders of the two others, blowing some sort of pipe with stops. They made a glorious noise together, too fast for our blues-trained feet, but nobody minded. We bounded and galloped and twisted about and got hot and happy, and between dances wandered out into the little square, where you could hear the trees talking.

It was a good idea. It was cheap. It was innocent, as only Paris can be innocent. And when it ended something in an epoch came to an end and was written off, but at the same time its successor was announced—a less desirable guest.

There was a woman come lately to Paris, from somewhere in Central Europe by way of New York, who made her living by giving us something to talk about. She wrote verse that consisted wholly of noises. We are hardened to that by now, but she was one of the first. Her history was the kind this writer has a personal distaste for, but which many consider romantic, and acclaim, if not in their purses (and it always is), in their indulgence. Hers was the usual kind. She had been a beautiful model; she had made a marriage that gave her a stately title, a name that suited her less than any name you can imagine. He had then killed himself, and his family, ruined by the man, would neither pay her nor acknowledge her. So she had set up in New York, on the strength of her name, to become a family curse, blackmailing them across the water, but innocently, like a child that has been taught bad language. The sort of story one has heard, with its legend of past beauty and boundless wealth and innumerable lovers.

We heard a great deal about her past beauty. She worked a variation on the aged-courtesan theme: now it was gone, so let it go. Indeed, her chief stunt, which made us all laugh and sympathize and even contribute to her support, was a rather witty definition of her lost loveliness. First she dyed her fading hair bright green. Then she shaved it off and lacquered her head scarlet, painting on the skull a phallic sign. She varied this device on other parts, not usually visible. On each knee—and her knees showed—she painted a skull; for an umbrella she carried a hearth brush, and for jewels wore odd bits of tin junk from the dustbin. I remember one of those wire sponges used to scrape plates, hung on a bootlace for a pendant, and a hat topped with a bottle brush for a hat pin. Another hat made entirely from a coal scoop.

I can never make out now whether one is in the wrong when one neither laughs unconcernedly at this nor weeps at its pathos, when on the whole one thinks it rather beastly and shrugs one's shoulders. Most people laughed and were rather kind, some were very kind. One excuse was that it would have been different if the poems had been any good.


à Mary
✯
Jean
All good wishes.
from Mary Butts.
Christmas. 1931.

Compared in her time to D. H. Lawrence and Katherine Mansfield, Mary Butts is one of the last great unknown writers of the twenties generation. Drawing by Jean Cocteau.

COURTESY ESTATE OF MARY BUTTS/© 1998 ARS, NEW YORK/ADAGP, PARIS

In many ways, the Empress, as the Americans called her, was not unamicable. To some of the people who had stood by her in times of stress, she was loyal—picking out, as such persons do, her loyalties at hazard. Nothing was allowed to be said against one woman who had done her such and such a service, while nothing could be too bad for another who had really done as much, if not more. Haphazard caprice, as is the way of such women, and to the Empress it was women now who were kind. Men seemed not to fall for it.

Yet there was a point on which the aging courtesan (oddly enough, she appeared far older than she was, already something of the crone) would not have a doubt cast, and where the most veiled incredulity provoked fury: the supposition that men no longer wished to take her to bed. It seemed to me that the wretched suicide of her last husband—much as she claimed that he did it on her account and some friends of his that he had only married her when he was drunk and, on sobering, had fled—had affected her in some way she did not explain, driven her actually a little mad. Something had shaken her faith in herself, more than creeping age and fading looks and even poverty shake that faith. So she insisted that, in spite of the lacquer and the hearth brush, she could still snare men. As in youth she must have done, for she had been very beautiful. But it was all too grotesque and rather obscene to be to one's taste. And yet—and yet—one is not proud of oneself for having shrugged so much. For one thing, one did not really *know*. One heard much, and finally saw only one thing.

I had dined across the river with a young man, who was a saga in himself, a whole string of wind songs. I did not know him well, and we sat talking; and when he said "Where shall we go?" I answered, "Let's try the Master's dancing. It's ages since I've been there."

It was a quiet, dark winter night when our taxi drew up. We were high up, with most of Paris beneath us, though we could not see it, because of the tall houses like cliff faces between us and the breakaway down to the river. The little café gave directly onto the pavement. Through its open doors we could see already several of our friends in silhouette. Neither the Old Master nor his wife was there. They had gone away south, and until the spring the parties supposedly would stop; only with the spring—the adorable Paris spring—would they begin again. But here we were, and here was another party, even without the Old Master, for the parties had become a fixture, a habit. The young man, who was called Valentine, went in with me. We were tranquil, not elated. At once, there came over us that sense of dislocation when the people in a normal state enter a ring, a circle of others, threaded by a similar and violent excitement, whirling in it. One had better try at once to get into their state, join them spiritually as well as actually. Or else stay quiet, just outside that ring.

In an instant our friends broke upon us like waves, and the smoke, music, roar of talk, and glitter of lights and glass were like a spray, springing up, drenching us.

Immediately we saw the Empress in the middle of the shiny floor, her hunched body tied up in strips of gold lace, its rags torn in points, with the round bright lids that come off cigarette tins for tassels. Behind her was something that swung and rolled with a hard rumble, audible under the cries and shouts and the swing of the concertina above our heads, as the huge man up there blared out "Valencia." I saw that it was the large colored-glass knob of a door handle. Valentine handed me a glass of vile and potent brandy, and I stepped over the ring into the run and tap and pounce and shout and stamp and roar of that evening's entertainment.

For we did dance, years of rigidly controlled blues and tangos and neat foxtrots gone west like an inhibition as we bumped and galloped. The men swung the women round, and the women came to pieces and lost their shoes, and their hair hung over their eyes in wet rags and their beads broke. Lionel, an enormous Irishman, picked me up, and I found myself lifted and dropped and banged about and I lost my breath and roared with laughter. I flung myself onto a side table to get my breath and was snatched off again and flung through the air, singing "Valencia" at the top of my lungs with the rest, until we fetched off panting in the outer bar and poured down what did a good deal more than quench our thirst.

When my breath steadied and I looked back, the floor was emptier. Some people began to go away. It was our own set, the group of our friends, who stayed—out to make a night of it, as I was by then. Or almost. Perhaps that long and furious dance had torn a nerve of energy out of me, but I found that I was outside the ring again, not quite comfortable, but more than able to watch.

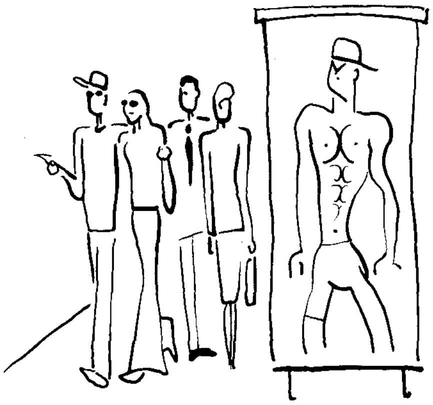
In the middle of the floor, the Empress was still at her pas seul, something between Salome and a cakewalk. Her head low, she danced with such concentration that it made me think of spells and witchcraft and the winding up of chains. Valentine joined us, along with Alleyne, the lovely, lazy woman all men and most women loved, and who of all people had been the kindest to the Empress.

"She's mad at me tonight," Alleyne said. "She will have it that Lionel's in love with her, because he asked her if he could paint her. Offered to do the lacquer a new way. She thought he meant hand-holding, and nothing I could say, I mean about Lionel not loving *anybody*, made a bit of difference. He would keep dancing with me, and look at him now. I said I wouldn't dance again if he wouldn't dance with the Empress, and all he's doing is lying on the floor under the table making noises and trying to catch her by the leg and trip her up. Won't anybody try and make him give her a dance?"

It was only too true. I could just see Lionel, the Irishman, lying happily on his front, creeping out from under a table and trying to grab the Empress by an ankle. I knew as well as anyone else that the heavens could fall before Lionel exchanged amusement for duty.

As we made again for the dancing floor I saw Lionel take the doorknob and fling it out with a neat spin that wrapped the cord tight round the Empress's ankles and tripped her up, just the way a weighted skipping rope used to do at school. She went down suddenly with a bump that must have split the lacquer, and then she sat on the floor looking up at us. I did not like the look in those sad and starving eyes. A wave of laughter broke out, led by Lionel's high, wild giggle, and then we plunged into it again, stamping our feet in their crushed shoes.

A QUARTER of an hour later, I limped again to the bar, Valentine with me. We were all there, trying to drink and talk at the top of our voices, through our lost breath. The floor was almost empty, except for the Empress, on her feet again and going on with her solo. She was turning round and round with minute steps in a circle, within her own axis, her head now back like a hen drinking, now bent down, with those starving eyes on the floor.



Then, from under the tables, Lionel came out like a dachshund or a ferret or an exceedingly long young man, and sprang down the steps to the lane between the café tables, his arms wide out, and caught Alleyne.

"One more dance before they close up," he cried. They raced back to the floor together and danced. Before the Empress, alongside the Empress, past the Empress. We joined them, and in minutes we had all joined hands, playing ring-a-ring-of-roses round the Empress, with a song—not the original song—to match.

Somebody slipped and the circle broke and flew out in all directions. Lionel, flung out against a wall, struck his head, staggered, and slipped down full length, unconscious. I remember his long brown hands with the fingers spread as though feeling the plaster as he fell. His friend, another Irishman, rushed to him. I had fallen sideways, and my arm, breaking my fall, had not broken. Valentine had fallen clean down the steps and clear of them and was beginning to sit up. I went to him. A girl had fallen onto a table. A man had rolled under a table. Above our heads, the concertina swayed and blazed and the drum rattled and the pipe shrieked, it seemed now, without a stop.

Again, instantly, I found myself outside it all, as my breath came back and my voice came into control. Time for a bath and bed. I was a little irritated that I had not lost myself and was not now determined to carry on till morning and let the next day's work go hang. Valentine and I helped each other to the bar to get a drink. We were perhaps still a little dazed. Thinking of my cloak, we looked back, and it was then that we began to take in the disaster behind us.

People were picking themselves up and groaning, but Alleyne was lying where she had fallen. The Empress was still dancing where she had been dancing before, but, if you like, a step up. She was dancing on Alleyne, up and down her body. On her belly and on her breast. She gave a little jump, and it was on her face, and already blood was beginning to pour from Alleyne's nose. There was a pool of it on the floor before Valentine went over and knocked the Empress off.

As he shoved at her she clung and nearly had him over again, and then we all began to crowd round. I fell on my knees, trying to see how hurt Alleyne was. Her eyes were closed and she was trying to say something. The band, which had paused for a second while it pulled at a beer that someone had handed up, began again with a crash. "Valencia" again. I saw Lionel, recovered, try to beat time feebly. I stayed kneeling by Alleyne, her blood getting over my dress, and now running on my bare arms, and on Valentine's shirtfront, who was kneeling opposite.

Somehow we got her up onto a chair. The band screamed on. There was broken glass on the floor where a table had been knocked over, and at the café door a few workmen of the quarter had come in for a quiet drink and were staring at what was going on.

"We must get her home," said Valentine, and I knew he was still outside the ring, just as I was. I saw the Empress, no longer dancing but sitting malevolently in a corner, counting the tins on the ends of the rags. Two or three of the fallen were making an effort to dance again. Valentine got Alleyne up. I snatched my cloak. Just then the band made a final effort, and someone sprang up onto a table, towering enormously over the tiny room. It was the Irishman, Lionel, who now began to conduct to the wild tune. A rain of something cool and sticky pattered on my face. He was conducting with roses—my roses, the red roses Valentine had given me to carry, which had slipped into the pool of blood from Alleyne on the floor. He whirled them round and the drops flew, a scarlet rain over walls and floor and over our mouths and eyes and hair. It was a benediction calling upon us to thank the absent, infinitely correct givers of our party, and wouldn't they be surprised if they could see us now.

"This will bring down the curtain on the Old Master's parties, I bet," said Valentine. We got Alleyne down the steps, as with one last sweep the Irishman sprayed the room again. The flowers were beginning to come to pieces, the petals flying, and one broken-off head hit the back of my neck. The *patron* had called a taxi, and we took Alleyne home.

For weeks after, before Alleyne was about again, long before she was fit to look at, people spoke of that party as one of the funniest things that ever happened.

Now, was it funny, or wasn't it? ♦

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We'll talk again.

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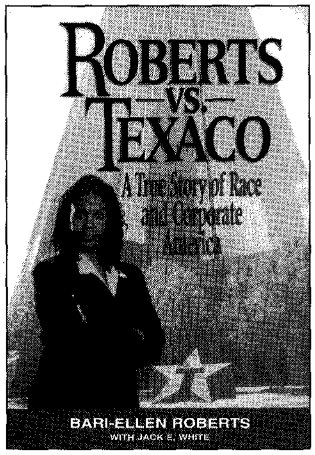

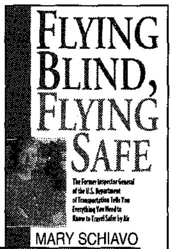

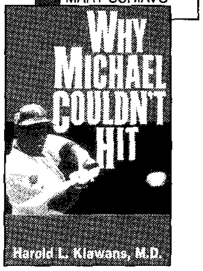

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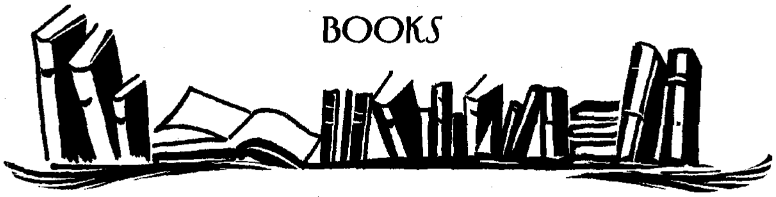

IMMORTAL ISAAC

What Newton's mind teaches about the pace of science.

BY JOHN UPDIKE

The impulse to reveal awkward truths about the famous and great has extended to the marmoreal, rather abstract figure of Isaac Newton, the discoverer of the law of gravitation and the inventor of the calculus. Michael White, in introducing his "Isaac Newton: The Last Sorcerer" (Addison-Wesley; $27), proposes that "Newton was not the man that history has claimed him to be"; that is, "the most respected scientist in history, the model for the scientific method, had spent more of his life intensely involved with alchemy than he had delving into the clear blue waters of pure science." The sensational story—if any story centuries old can be sensational—was highlighted when, in 1936, the economist John Maynard Keynes purchased a raft of Newton's papers at Sotheby's and, after studying them, announced, to the distracted England of 1942, that Newton was "the last of the magicians, the last of the Babylonians and Sumerians, the last great mind which looked out on the visible and intellectual world with the same eyes as those who began to build our intellectual inheritance rather less than 10,000 years ago." Which is a rousing way to say that Newton, a Puritan of Socinian—that is, anti-Trinitarian—persuasion, had a mind soaked in theism. But who, back then, didn't? Newton was born in 1642, as England descended into a bloody civil war based upon religious opinions, and died in 1727, at just about the time when, all over Europe, men at last stopped killing each other on behalf of their versions of Christianity. His meticulous analyses of heavenly motion and the nature of light were carried out in an age that was still searching for the mythical philosophers' stone. Physics and chemistry were of a piece with philosophy and theology; delusion and reason walked hand in hand.

The virtue of White's biography is that he attempts to integrate Newton's alchemical and Biblical studies with the seer's major discoveries in physics; its fault, which diminishes as the book goes on (or perhaps the reader simply gets used to it), lies in an overexcited prose of which "delving into the clear blue waters" is an example. In the same paragraph we find something "stuck in the craw of those early biographers" (a collective craw, an uncomfortable concept) and elsewhere an inapposite "To rub salt into Isaac's emotional wounds, he never knew when or if his mother would turn up." White, whose previous books include co-written lives of Einstein, Stephen Hawking, and Darwin, and children's biographies of Mozart, Galileo, and John Lennon, seems to feel that his present subject needs a verbal boost into liveliness; Newton, at various junctions of his career, is chummily seen to "let his hair down" and to be "walking on eggshells." Nevertheless, the biography delivers a mass of information about a man who in his lifetime obfuscated and romanticized the basic biographical facts.

Newton never married and enjoyed few close relationships. His father, a prosperous yeoman also called Isaac, died of an unnamed disease, at the age of thirty-six, a few months before his son's birth. The birthplace, the Lincolnshire hamlet of Woolsthorpe, was, according to White, "little more than a collection of small farms and humble country dwellings clustered around the manor house"—a house belonging to the Newtons. The birth occurred, auspiciously, on Christmas Day, a fact that Newton later liked to emphasize, along with the infant frailty he miraculously survived. Either he—"small enough to fit into a quart pot"—was premature or he was conceived before his parents' marriage, that April. His mother, Hannah, came from the Ayscoughs, lower gentry whose sons went to universities and "found their way into parsonages and lectureships." When young Isaac, an only child, was three, she married Barnabas Smith, the elderly, well-to-do rector of North Witham, a hamlet about a mile from Woolsthorpe. It was decided that she would move to her new husband's home but Isaac would stay in the Newton manor, with his maternal grandparents, James and Margery Ayscough. Smith, though in his sixties, fathered three children by Hannah; when he died, in 1653, she moved back to Woolsthorpe. But by then Isaac was eleven and the damage was done.

How much damage it was remains, of course, speculative; in an age before child psychology, when free-ranging deaths by disease disarranged nearly every family constellation, such a separation was perhaps unexceptional. Property issues were involved—Hannah wished to maintain her claim to the Newton manor—and the distance was small. Visits back and forth must have been frequent. Some advantages surely existed for the fatherless boy in the guardianship of a grandfather and grandmother, though White dismissively says, "As Newton never mentioned his grandparents later in life, it would appear there was little love lost between them." Some evidence survives that the boy was unhappy: at the age of nineteen Newton drew up a list of his sins, going back to childhood, of which No. 13 reads, "Threatening my father and mother Smith to burne them and the house over them," and No. 14, more generally, "Wishing death and hoping it to some." Out of whatever early unhappiness, he developed the resources of solitude; he was in his triumphs as in his foibles secretive, tenacious, and self-directed.

At the age of twelve, not long after his mother returned, with her three new children, he went off to King's School, in Grantham, a market town seven miles distant. He boarded with the family of the local apothecary, the Clarks, and it was under their care that he emerged—at least in the memories of townsmen interviewed by Newton's first biographer, William Stukeley—as a mechanical genius, concocting kites, sundials, paper lanterns, and a miniature windmill powered by a resident mouse. The education of the time consisted of Greek, Latin, and the Bible, with perhaps a little Euclid. Practical science was to be had, however, in the apothecary shop of New-

That Newton spent hours poring over the Bible reminds us how gradually Europe emerged from its thousand years of theocentricity.

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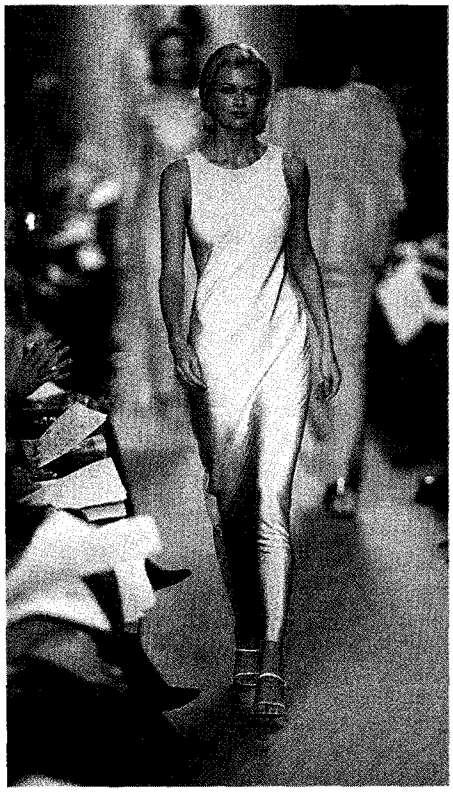

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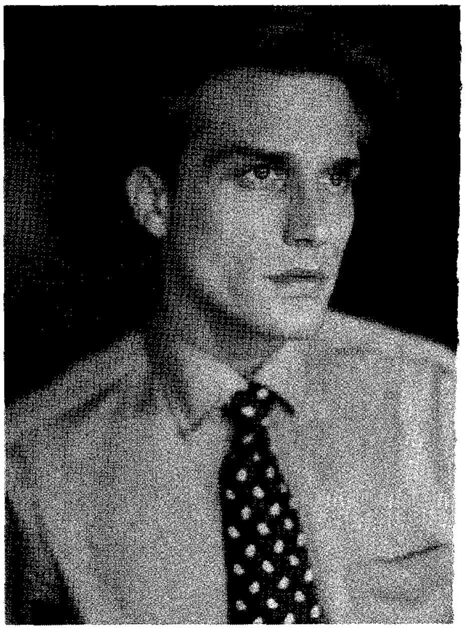

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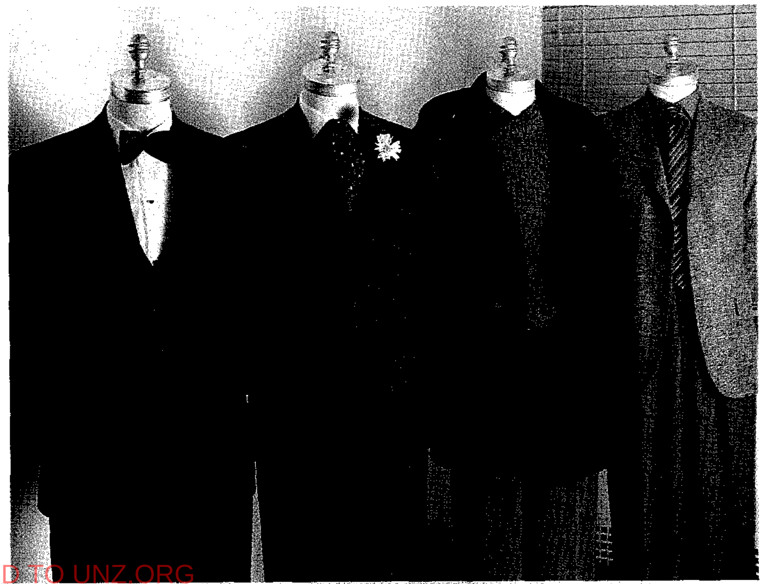

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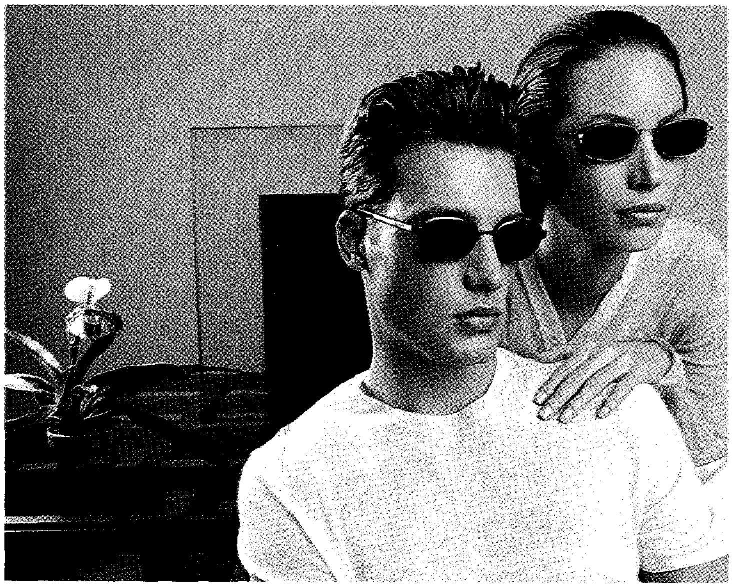

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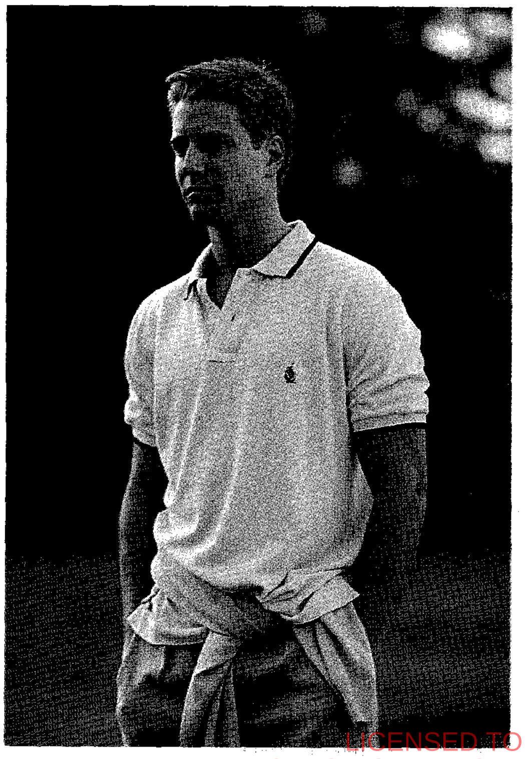

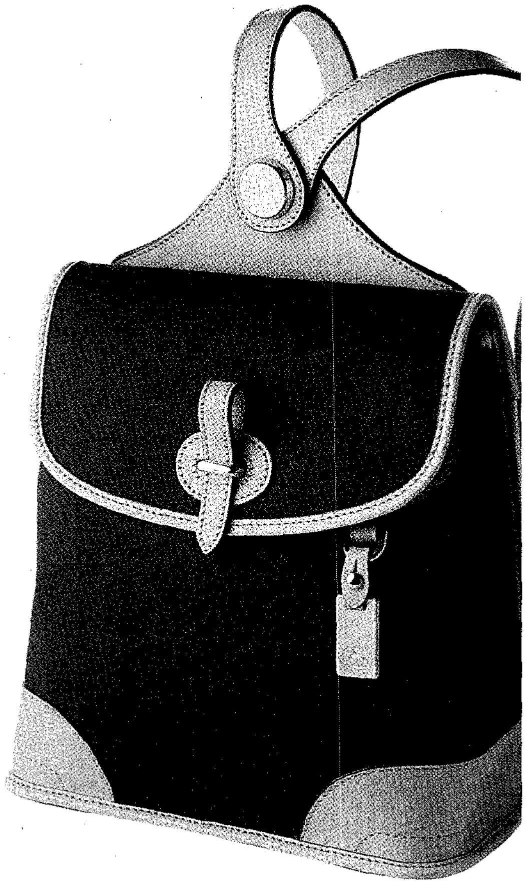

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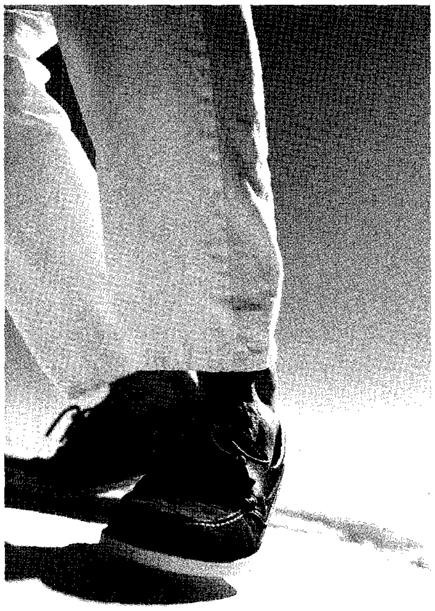

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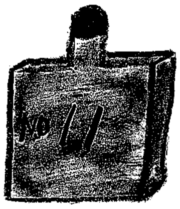
ton's surrogate father, Mr. Clark, and surviving notebooks show the young boarder transcribing prescriptions and cures, methods of producing paints and cutting glass with chemicals. At King's School, he had gone from being an indifferent student to being the best, yet his mother resisted the headmaster's urging that the gifted boy pursue his education; she wanted Isaac to help her run the farm, counting sheep and marketing produce. At this he proved sluggish and inept, a less effective farmer than his illiterate father. Finally, Hannah—whose own brother, William Ayscough, had gone to Cambridge—relented; Isaac was allowed to resume at Grantham and go on to Cambridge, where, as sizar, scholar, fellow, and, finally, Lucasian Professor of Mathematics, he was to remain for nearly thirty-five secluded, prodigious years.

White, a former science lecturer, goes easy on the well-worn anecdotes of Newton as the ultimate absent-minded professor—he was "so serious upon his studies," his assistant later testified, that "ofttimes he has forgot to eat at all"—and instead tries to explain what made his scientific work so special and, to his contemporaries, marvellous. His work on optics first brought him to the attention of the London scientific establishment, embodied in the recently founded Royal Society. Glass prisms had existed since the first century A.D., but until Newton no one had thought to conduct a set of simple experiments that showed the sun's light to be composed of different colors, the difference determined by the degree of refraction. To demonstrate the invariance of the colors and their angles, he passed a section of the spectrum—the blue end, say—through a second prism, and observed that the blue passed through unchanged, with no accompanying reds and yellows. He also refocussed the spectrum with a lens, restoring it to white light.

From these experiments he concluded, a bit rashly, that "it can no longer be disputed . . . whether light be a body"—i.e., whether light is corpuscular, composed of what we now call particles. The dominant contemporary view held that light consisted of waves, propagated through the hypothetical medium of ether. Robert Hooke, a rival scientist who was to prove a lifelong detractor, said that Newton's experiments "seem to me to prove that light is nothing but a pulse or motion propa-



gated through an homogeneous, uniform and transparent medium." The confusion is understandable, since light paradoxically demonstrates both particle and wave behavior. Less understandable to a modern temper is the failure of Hooke or anyone else, for four years, to test Newton's hypothesis by duplicating his experiments. Scientists of the time, who were called natural philosophers, preferred to debate theory and reason a priori. Hypotheses outranked evidence. A Parisian Jesuit called Ignace Gaston Pardies had trouble accepting Newton's "very extraordinary hypothesis" and wrote the Royal Society asking for an elaboration. Newton testily replied, "For the best and safest method of philosophising seems to be, first to inquire diligently into the properties of things, and establishing those properties by experiments and then to proceed more slowly to hypotheses for explanations of them.... For if the possibility of hypotheses is to be the test of the truth and reality of things, I see not how certainty can be obtained in any science."

WILLIAM BLAKE depicted Newton as a beautiful angel measuring the world with compasses; in "Jerusalem" he wrote, "For Bacon and Newton, sheath'd in dismal steel, their terrors hang/Like iron scourges over Albion.../cruel works/Of many wheels I view, wheel within wheel, with cogs tyrannic/Moving by compulsion each other." Newton struck terror into the sensitive with his ability to conceive of the universe as if man—the observer, the measure of all things—were irrelevant. In 1664, at the age of twenty-one, he wrote in his notebook, "The nature of things is more securely and naturally deduced from their operations one upon another than upon the senses. And when by...experiments we have found the nature of bodies...we may more clearly find the nature of the senses." With something of Darwin's reluctance to publish, Newton allowed his findings and deductions to pile up around him in Cambridge. His masterwork, the "Principia Mathematica," which White extolls as "probably the greatest single work of science ever written...the fabled elixir, the alchemist's gold, the philosophers' stone," had to be coaxed from him. In 1684, the suave young astronomer Edmond Halley travelled from London to Cambridge to solicit from Newton a proof that Hooke had promised but had failed to deliver, concerning the elliptical orbits of planets. Newton claimed that he had already made the calculations but could not find them; he did provide, after three months, a nine-page manuscript on the motion of revolving bodies, "De Motu Corporum in Gyrum." Halley quickly saw in it the seeds of a universal system of dynamics, and promised to publish an extended treatment. Thus encouraged, Newton wrote the "Principia," a work of five hundred and fifty dense and difficult pages, in a mere eighteen months.

The best-known proposition in the "Principia"—No. VII of Book III, "Every particle of matter attracts every other particle with a force proportional to the product of the masses and inversely proportional to the square of the distances between them"—first took form in Newton's considerations, a piece of parchment from 1666 shows, as the calculation of the opposite, repulsive, receding force by which planets seek to escape the sun as they revolve. The act of revolution can be visualized as a ball swung on a string, and Newton concerned himself first with the centrifugal force of the ball, which from planetary observations was shown to be inversely proportional to the square of the length of the string. What was true for the escaping force proved true for the force of attraction. The string that holds the planets in place was discernible in such a humble event as the fall of an apple to the earth, which Newton claimed inspired his first speculations, back in a Woolsthorpe orchard. The speculations, as Newton, shortly before his death, described them to Stukeley, were:

> Why should that apple always descend perpendicularly to the ground, thought he to himself? Why should it not go sideways or upwards, but constantly to the earth's centre? Assuredly, the reason is, that the earth draws it. There must be a drawing power in matter: and the sum of the drawing power in the matter of the earth must be in the earth's centre, not in any side of the earth.... If matter thus draws matter, it must be in proportion of its quantity. Therefore the apple draws the earth, as well as the earth draws the apple. That there is a power, like that we here call gravity, which extends itself through the universe.

White contends that this "drawing power" would have been inconceivable to

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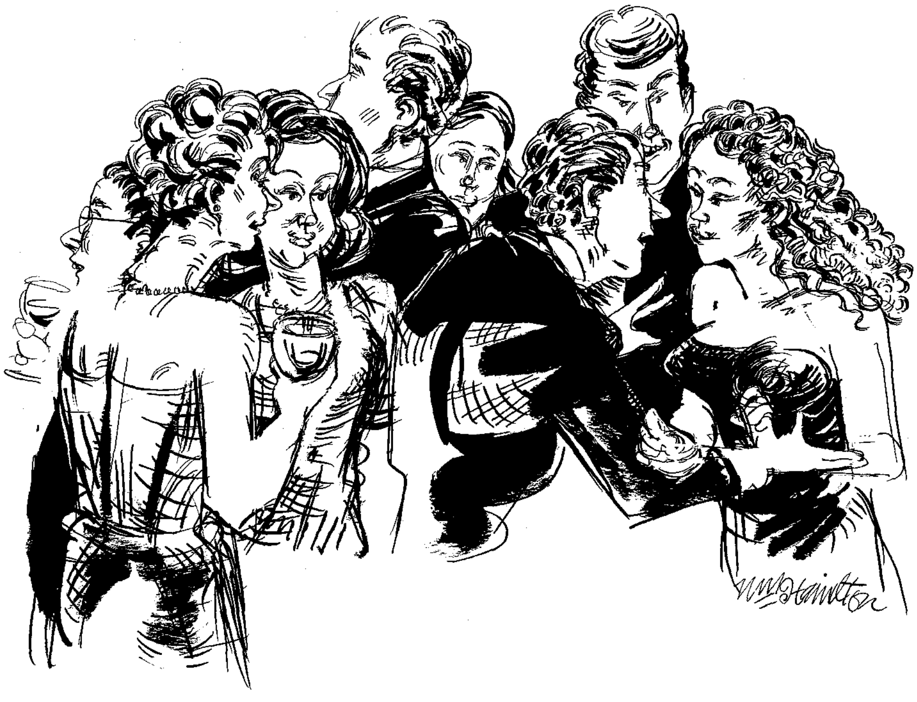
Newton without his long and earnest immersion in alchemy, which explained chemical reactions in terms of "active principles" guided by God and channelled through the alchemist, if he was spiritually pure enough. Newton's alchemical papers and notes tell how "they call lead a magnet because mercury attracts the seed of Antimony," and how "certain metals or salts are 'drawn' or 'extracted,'" and how substances "laid hold" of others or are "held down." He posits "an exceeding subtle & unimaginably small portion of matter diffused through the mass which, if it were separated, there would remain but a dead & inactive earth." The exotic, mysticized vocabulary that alchemy applied to observed but dimly understood chemistry inspired, in Newton's mind, the sweeping hypothesis of gravitational attraction, a force operating through empty space, at any distance, and effecting the orbits of the planets and of comets (conveniently frequent in the sixteen-eighties), the precession of Earth's poles, and the action of the tides. The clockwork universe was unveiled; the dynamics were explicated that would make possible the industrial revolution. And all because, according to White, "Newton saw the power of attraction and repulsion at the bottom of the alchemist's crucible."

In a sense, alchemy was the particle physics of its day. Without any knowledge of the atomic structure of the elements, it could not arrive at correct conclusions, but its intuition of powerful, transformative forces within matter was correct. There is nothing intrinsically stranger about turning lead into gold with the aid of mercury than about uranium's radioactive decay into lead or the creation of heavy elements from a stew of lighter ones during the death convulsions of stars. As Newton said, "nature is a perpetual circulatory worker, generating fluids out of solids, and solids out of fluids, fixed things out of volatile, & volatile out of fixed." He, whose calculus exploits the power of the infinitesimal, had intuitions of atomic potency: "Have not the small particles of bodies certain powers, virtues or forces, by which they act at a distance, not only upon the rays of light for reflecting, refracting and inflecting them, but also upon one another for producing a great part of the phenomena of Nature?" Like Einstein, he illumined the microcosm and the macrocosm simultaneously, boiling a welter of phenomena down to a single formula: $E=mc^2$ in Einstein's case, $F=Gm_1m_2/r^2$ in Newton's.

THAT such thinkers, after salad days of carelessly abundant radical insights, should bog down in relatively futile conjectures tells us less, it may be, about the human brain than about the pace of scientific knowledge, which must slowly ripen between harvests by the sudden genius. That Newton devoted so much time and passion to alchemical pursuits which now seem fantastic only places him in his era, one of witch-hunts and barbarously misconstrued medical theory. That he spent hours poring over the Bible, compiling charts and dictionaries, reminds us how gradually Europe emerged from its thousand years of theocentricity. Newton searched the Bible for confirmation of his own, dangerously anti-Trinitarian views, and for the *prisca sapientia*—the wisdom that he, with the Rosicrucians, believed the ancients possessed and had secreted in their documents. The Middle Ages had, in truth, erased some ancient knowledge. The Greek astronomer Eratosthenes, in the third century B.C., calculated the circumference of the round earth to be twenty-four thousand miles (less than a thousand miles off the true value) and the distance to the sun to be ninety-two million miles, a stunningly close estimation. But the Old and New Testaments did not hold such mathematical wisdom; Newton researched the prophetic utterances of Daniel and St. John for a chronology of the future, and carefully concluded that Satan's spell over the world would be broken in the year 1867. He did not know that his own science had excused God from running the universe, allowing Him merely the initial push—a push, astronomers recently concluded, that will carry everything infinitely outward, into darkness and heat death.

In 1696, Newton moved from Cambridge to London, and his history becomes more that of a man than that of a mind. The eccentric Lucasian Professor, scratching celestial diagrams on the university's gravel walks and abstrusely lecturing to empty lecture halls in the clothes he had slept in, had secured a royal sinecure: thanks to Charles Montagu, known as Lord Halifax, William III had appointed Newton the Warden of the Mint. The pedagogue surprised everyone by filling this office, second to that of the Master of the Mint, with efficiency and zeal. The critical task of recoinage—minting new coins to replace the crude, worn-out, easily clipped and counterfeited coins in circulation, some dating from the reign of Ed-



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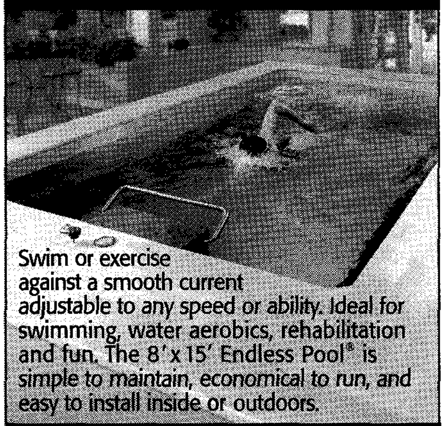

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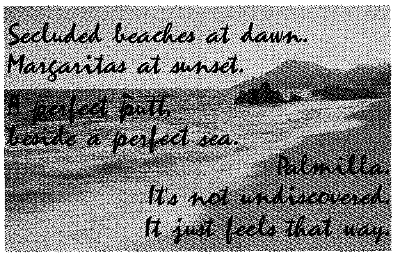

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ward VI—was in progress; the economy of the nation, shaken by a century of civil war, plague, fire, and foreign war, depended on it. Newton kept the horse-driven coin presses working on two ten-hour shifts six days a week, and personally supervised the war against clippers (who snipped precious metal from the coins) and counterfeiters, sending many of them, including a picturesque scofflaw named William Chaloner, to the gallows. It is a topic for a gaudy, sardonic historical novel by Peter Ackroyd or Peter Carey: Newton in the depths, "following leads in the heart of the liberties"—the East End slums—"and arranging secret meetings with informants in gin-houses and brothels." He proved adroit and ravenous in the expansion of the Warden's power. Two days after the lazy, hard-drinking Master, Thomas Neale, died, in 1699, Newton succeeded to the post, on his fifty-seventh Christmas Day birthday. His income went from hundreds of pounds to thousands; the yeoman's son from Woolsthorpe had become a very rich Londoner.

The lady of his house, on Jermyn Street, was Catherine Barton, his niece by his half sister Hannah Smith and the clergyman Robert Barton, whose death left his family destitute. Catherine, a lively and greatly admired beauty, charmed Jonathan Swift and was Lord Halifax's lover from 1703 to his death, in 1715. Newton in his new worldliness accepted the arrangement, but his own sex life remains a blank. The attractions he purportedly experienced, whether heterosexual (to Catherine Storer, back in Grantham, when he was boarding there) or homosexual (to Nicholas Fatio de Duillier, a young Swiss mathematician who won his favor in the early sixteen-nineties), produced, by the available evidence, no bodily collisions. Newton was a Puritan and a passionate intellectual. Even when engrossed in the material concerns of the Mint, he rose to a mathematical challenge. For more than twenty years, he had experienced a rivalry with the German polymath Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, who had invented the calculus independently of Newton, and with a superior notation. At Leibniz's instigation, in 1697, the Swiss mathematician Johann Bernoulli sent Newton a problem—known as the "brachistochrone"—that neither he nor Leibniz could solve. Catherine Barton later recalled, "Sir I. N. was in the midst of the hurry of the great recoinage, & did not come home until four from the Tower very much tired, but did not sleep till he had solved it which was by 4 in the morning." Not sleeping even then, he sent the solution to the president of the Royal Society, with the request that it be published in the *Philosophical Transactions* anonymously. Bernoulli wrote a friend that only Newton could be the author: "I can tell the lion by the mark of his claw."

Newton was leonine in defense of his intellectual property: in the laboriously courteous language of the day, he feuded with Leibniz over the calculus, with Hooke over optics, with the first astronomer royal, John Flamsteed, over heavenly data that Newton needed for his revision of the "Principia." Newton outlived and outshone them all, accepting from England a succession of rewards. He was elected to Parliament, knighted by Queen Anne, and made president of the Royal Society, which he subjected to the same energetic, high-handed, restorative treatment he had given the Royal Mint. Up to his death, in 1727, at the age of eighty-four, he continued his theological researches, more intensely than ever. Michael White writes, "This activity was an expression of his inner drives, a manifestation of his desire to analyse, to draw together disparate themes . . . keeping his mind alert . . . after the excitement of intellectual warfare had passed." Newton's nearly complete sublimation of inner drives into mental endeavor may strike modern sensibilities as cold and freakish. His father's death and his mother's desertion left him, perhaps, a stubborn—in Melville's term—isolato. He was most loved by those who could admire from afar the beauty of persevering, logical thought. Though himself devotedly religious, he became a symbol of cruel reason, which would rob us of our cherished illusions. Keats complained that Newton had "destroyed all the poetry of the rainbow." From another perspective, he made of the rainbow a reproducible experiment, so that—in the words of another poet, Elizabeth Bishop—"everything/was rainbow, rainbow, rainbow!" ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

SHADOWS ON THE HUDSON, by Isaac Bashevis Singer, translated from the Yiddish by Joseph Sherman (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $28). A great operatic sprawl of a novel, originally published in installments in the Yiddish *Forward,* about a postwar circle of émigrés who gather for Sabbath dinners in the Upper West Side apartment of the wealthy Boris Makaver. The events are unceasingly tempestuous: Grein, an investor with a passionate streak, runs off to Miami with Anna, Makaver's daughter (both are married); Luria, whom Anna abandoned, begins to have visions of his first wife, Sonia, who died in the camps; Solomon, Makaver's oldest friend, reëstablishes contact with *his* first wife, who left him for a Nazi; and so on. Nothing that happens, however, is so pressing that it cannot be interrupted for fierce argument—about sin, the dead, lost pieties, God's betrayals.

BLACK AND BLUE, by Anna Quindlen (Random House; $23). Frances Benedetto and her son Robert like to play a game called What If. ("What if the principal at your new school is a giraffe . . ."). In this searing novel, the question the author asks is: What if your first sweetheart, now your husband and a cop, beats you repeatedly and you run away with your child to Florida? Following fault lines of power, dependence, and love, Quindlen takes her heroine to a bereaved country where there are no answers, only choices; in Brooklyn-born Frannie, she has created an utterly believable, flinty character.

THE HOUSE OF SLEEP, by Jonathan Coe (Knopf; $24). Nothing happens randomly in this propulsive comic fugue, in which chapters alternate between the nineteen-eighties and 1996. A sadist who runs a sleep laboratory is fascinated by his college girlfriend's occasional inability to distinguish what she did from what she dreamed, and her confusion eventually results in one friend's being sued by Kingsley Amis and Denis Thatcher, and in another's getting a sex change. Embracing satires on Lacan, cinemaphilia, and much else, this fiendishly clever book manages not to send up its intelligent characters or trivialize the weird but weirdly touching love story at its heart.

THE LAST OF THE AFRICAN KINGS, by Maryse Condé, translated from the French by Richard Philcox (Nebraska; $12). Spero, a desultory watercolorist and diffident adulterer living in Charleston, South Carolina, is the descendant of an African king who was exiled to the Caribbean. His wife, Debbie, is an African-American—with the emphasis on the hyphen—and her romanticized sense of Spero and of his heritage turns their life together into a netherworld in which everyone seems to be a tourist and no one belongs. In Condé's hands, the transformation proves emotionally resonant and politically scathing, as she weaves African myth, Caribbean folklore, and American arrogance into the fabric of this fine post-colonial novel.

AN INSTANCE OF THE FINGERPOST, by Iain Pears (Riverhead; $27). Robert Boyle, the devout chemist, and John Thurloe, Cromwell's inscrutable spymaster, are among the historical characters who figure in this richly imagined mystery set in Oxford in the sixteen-sixties, after Charles II has been restored to the throne. A Fellow of New College is found dead, and a woman accused of whoring and witchcraft is sentenced to hang for the murder. Three narrators—all unreliable and all self-interested—tell their versions of the story, which unfolds in a turbulent atmosphere of scientific, political, and religious dissent. Not until a fourth, and final, narrator speaks are the mysteries, including the meaning of the book's title, revealed.

A LOVER'S ALMANAC, by Maureen Howard (Viking; $24.95). In this playfully romantic adaptation of the *Old Farmer's Almanac*, two tales of love are interwoven: the first is that of Louise (Lou Lou), a painter famous for her Midwestern bovines, and Artie, a twenty-first-century cyber whiz; the second is that of Cyril, Artie's widowed Irish grandfather, and Sylvie, Cyril's rediscovered Austrian lover. Each couple possesses what the other lacks—time, experience, funds—but the lovers work earnestly, if not successfully, toward a veritable state of amour propre. Because Howard scripts their lives as she does her novel—according to celestial signs and calendrical markings—their attempts at reconfiguring fate are in vain.

THE MAGICIAN'S WIFE, by Brian Moore (Dutton; $23.95). Whether he is writing intelligent thrillers or taking on various moral questions of the century, Moore is a master fabricator, whose books combine swift narrative with perfectly imagined detail. In his newest novel, set in the France and North Africa of 1856, the heroine, Emmeline, is a provincial who is married to the celebrated illusionist Henri Lambert. They are invited to Napoleon III's Compiègne palace, and are eventually introduced to a scheme the Emperor has thought up: Henri is to employ his magician's art to prove to the Bedouins that the colonial French are truly their betters. The story (which ends, literally, with a death-defying trick) is based on a real incident, and Moore has transformed it into superior fiction.

UNDER THE SNOW, by Kerstin Ekman, translated from the Swedish by Joan Tate (Doubleday; $22.95). Ekman, one of Sweden's most celebrated authors, is ostensibly a crime novelist but essentially a fabulist: here the cast includes a lost princess, an ugly sister, a simpleton stranger, and a gnome. Her style is so spare and clear—the sound of a signal before any answer or echo—that when the reader realizes how complex the setup really is it's almost shocking, especially given the conditions that the author and her laconic detective, Torsson, have to work with: in the snowbound Arctic Circle, even the investigation of disappearance and murder takes place in the dark.

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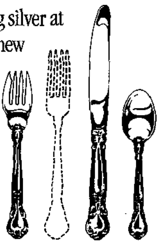

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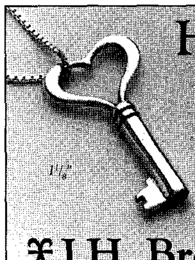

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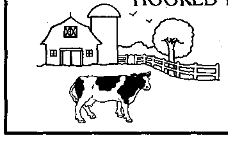

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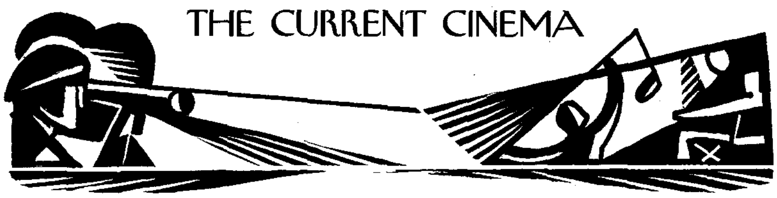
THE CURRENT CINEMA



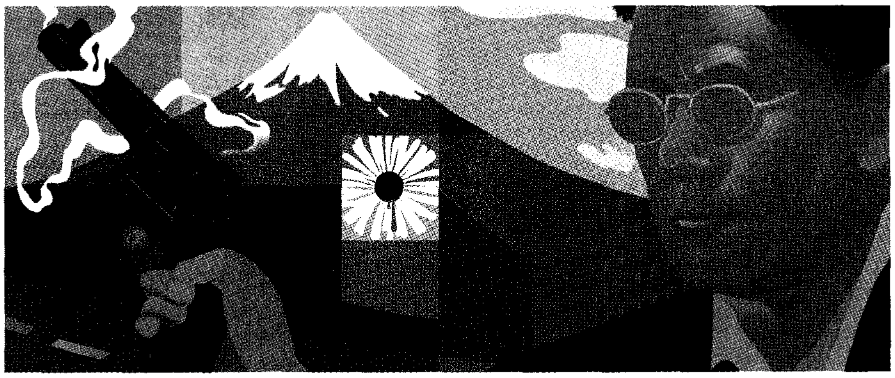
LOVE AND DEATH

Welcome to the cool comic world of Takeshi Kitano.

BY ANTHONY LANE

CLINT EASTWOOD triumphs as a standup comedian. Jerry Seinfeld overcomes public humiliation with a series of movies that bear unmistakable traces of Jean-Luc Godard. Christopher Walken is declared the public's No. 1 choice to be leader of the nation. Howard Stern wins the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival. Quentin Tarantino publishes a volume of verse. None of these alluring fantasies, sadly, are likely to come true in the foreseeable future; scramble them together, however, and you will have some idea of the achievements of Takeshi Kitano.

Kitano has one of the best-known faces in Japan, although the more I look at his face the less I can imagine knowing it, or guessing what it hides. It is square and sculpted, with eyes that seem nearly whiteless, like a shark's. Kitano is one of those unusual creatures who look not only more expressive but positively benevolent in shades. The face has grown yet more unreadable since the right side of it was paralyzed, in 1994, when the drunken Kitano crashed his motorbike. Rumors that this was a suicide attempt were never confirmed and never went away, rather like the rumors of adultery that were published by a Japanese gossip rag in 1986. On that occasion, Kitano and a band of his fellow-comedians entered the magazine's offices and launched an assault with furled umbrellas. If that sounds like a clip from a Three Stooges movie, so much the better; since the nineteen-seventies, Kitano has been firing off his gags on both radio and television. I never had the privilege of seeing "Oretachi Hyokinzoku" on Fuji TV, although I like to think that it was funnier than its title, which means "We Are Wild and Crazy Guys."



Takeshi Kitano plays a former cop in his movie "Fireworks."

The endearing thing is that this weakness for dumb slapstick has refused to die down and has, in fact, grown into a serious strength. In 1989, Kitano began directing movies, and his seventh and most sombre work, "Fireworks," is still soaked in physical comedy. In the opening scene, a man washing a car slips and sprawls across the hood; another man, Nishi, compounds the indignity by kicking him in the butt. Things like this happen every few minutes, often in complete silence; there is a slowly deepening hint, of a kind that one hasn't encountered since the heyday of Jacques Tati, that the world is a stubborn place, unworthy of our trust, and sometimes downright malign. Nishi is, or was, a policeman, who—although he would never say as much—seems to blame himself for the messy and unnecessary shooting of three colleagues: one died, and another, Horibe

(Ren Osugi), ended up in a wheelchair and now spends his days making flower paintings. Nishi's wife, meanwhile, is dying of leukemia; they have already lost a daughter. These horrors should by rights contradict the comedy; instead, they are the night sky against which the gags whoosh and spit. Death is the crowning pratfall, the blackest joke of all.

Nishi is played by Kitano himself, who tends to star in his own films, always under his stage name, Beat Takeshi. He also wrote "Fireworks" and co-edited it, although you don't need the credits to tell you that: only the director would have the nerve to carve up his own work with such ruthless aplomb. The chronology in this movie is half an inch short of baffling; we learn about the death of a detective called Tanaka shortly before a ten-second flashback of the incident and far ahead of a more extended sequence that shows us what actually went on. The dedicated New York moviegoer of 1970, say, fresh from a decade's salty immersion in the New Wave, would have much less difficulty following the elliptical suavity of "Fireworks" than his younger counterpart will have today. I don't believe that Kitano is deliberately setting out to be difficult; he merely wants to assuage the heated and hysterical responses to which recent moviegoers have become acclimatized. He has been doing this since his début picture, in 1989, "Violent Cop" (guess what *that's* all about), and he set the standard for impassivity in the face of brute force long before Tarantino arrived on the scene. As an actor, moreover, Beat has long favored black suits and white shirts, whose only decoration is the occasional Pollockish flick of blood. In short, Kitano is the reservoir where they make the dogs.

"Fireworks" is the work of a man on the brink of thawing out. The savagery, it must be said, remains glacial, but it's now so swift that you could easily miss it if you looked down to rootle in your popcorn or turned aside to nuzzle your neighbor's neck. Only the eternally hip, of course, would consider this a good dating movie; if you can watch Nishi doing something unspeakable to a *yakuza* with a pair of chopsticks and still go out for sushi afterward, more cool you. (Kitano once topped a Japanese magazine poll in the category of "Man I'd Most Like to Talk to When I'm Upset." How about when *he's* upset?) Intercut with the nastiness is a tender study of marriage, as Nishi takes his incurable wife on a trip to the country. He finances it with a one-man bank raid, most of which we observe on footage from security cameras, and all of which is conducted in church-like quiet. Nishi has left the force and is going to the bad, pursued by his troubled colleagues, and yet it's hard to suppress the feeling that, for the first time in his life, this man is also going more profoundly to the good. He loves his wife, and the fact that they hardly exchange a word—she has two lines in the entire movie, and his dialogue can't be more than a few pages long—is proof of their perfect understanding. True, he wastes the odd gangster, but for once the killings have the force of a bitter protest against the one slow death over which Nishi has no dominion.

All this marks a major advance over a movie like "Sonatine," which was made five years ago and is only now being released here, on April 10th. That, too, is a bloody saga, in which Kitano plays a gangland heavy under threat, but, despite its deadpan gift for the surreal detail, the picture finds it hard to conceive of a life beyond the gun. Suicide, for instance, features in both plots, but what "Sonatine" offers as honorable, unfrightened ritual blooms, in the richer air of "Fireworks," into a devout act of the heart. The new film is more redolent of "A Scene at the Sea," a plangent and peaceable love story that Kitano made in 1991: both works demonstrate his unerring eye for the framing of figures in a landscape, and his rather touching desire to interrupt tranquillity with the kind of cheesy musical score that most of us associate with made-for-TV movies starring Jaclyn Smith. Kitano said in a recent interview, "I don't want to use any guns in my next film," and it is not primness about screen violence but a confidence in his powers of formal invention, in his craftsman's curiosity, which should lead us to respect that as a wise move. In Japan, of course, they have better things to think about, such as which of Beat Takeshi's seven weekly TV shows they should watch, or which of his six weekly magazine columns they should read, or which of his seven albums they should play, or which of his fifty-five books they should buy next. I myself am hoping to get hold of "Jingi naki Eigaron," which translates as "No Respect Film Theory." Me no either. ♦

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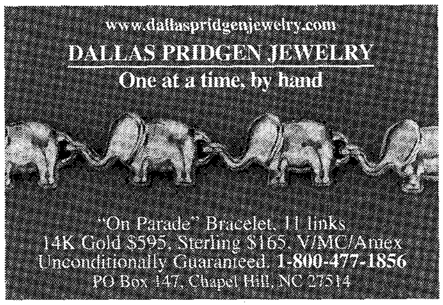
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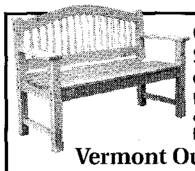
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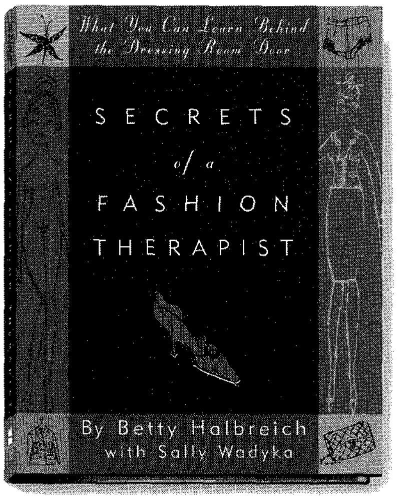

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MUSICAL EVENTS

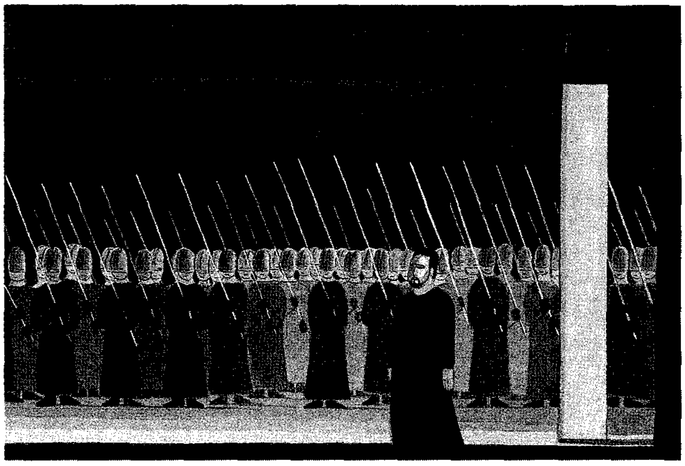
COMA

Robert Wilson's minimal "Lohengrin."

BY ALEX ROSS

A REMARKABLE sound came from the audience during a recent curtain call at the Metropolitan Opera. To call it booing doesn't do it justice: this was a penetrating moan, a wailing of mostly male Wagnerites in spiritual pain. It descended on Robert Wilson, the director of a new production of "Lohengrin," as he took a bow with the visibly shell-shocked singers who had moonwalked and baby-stepped across the stage all evening, in accordance with his designs. The noise was unearthly enough to sound like the reawakened and newly articulate spirit of the late Sir Rudolf Bing, who had planned the modern Met more as a showcase for big voices than as a showcase for big ideas. A change has come over the Met in the last few years: the house that made a cliché of the phrase "bastion of conservatism" has become, if not a hotbed of radicalism, then a place that gets an occasional thrill out of risk.

The first clear sign of a sort of New Zaniness at the Met was Francesca Zambello's de(con)struction of "Lucia di Lammermoor," in 1992. The bombed-out Gothic look of that production riled up the audience so much that a truly conservative management would have backed off. But the odd threesome that runs the Met—Joseph Volpe, the general manager; James Levine, the artistic director; and Bruce Crawford, the éminence grise of the governing board—has not backed off. The Zeffirelli spectaculars of the eighties, with their mountains of realist bric-a-brac, no longer set the tone of the house. This season has brought a "Samson et Dalila" drenched in gorgeous swaths of Matisse-like orange and blue; an overblown but highly amusing surrealist take on "La Cenerentola"; a coolly expressionistic "Rake's Progress," transferred to a twenties Berlin climate; and now this "Lohengrin," which is just the kind of cryptic, minimal, vaguely subversive, and, it must be said, not particularly expensive-looking production that often graces the stages of Europe.



Ben Heppner in Wilson's "Lohengrin": A heroic tenor cuts through the fog.

GEOFFREY PARKER

The curtain rises on . . . blue, a lot of blue, which represents . . . the sky, the void, *l'espace*, *die Leere*, or, perhaps, the ordinary Macintosh screen on which I am typing. A blurry band of white rises through the blue, making the L.E.D. screen into a Rothko. Straight white beams slowly move in from the top and the side—like Barnett Newman stripes laid across the Rothko. Or what have you.

The spectacle is interesting for a few minutes. The real shock comes in the ensuing hours, as these same beams move up and down, in and out, over and over again. A misshapen chair or a swan's wing occasionally appears, but Wilson never lets go of his well-worn abstractions. You have precious little to look at as the quarter hours go by. And when some small event does occur—when, say, the scheming Ortrud wanders to one side and starts pawing at the proscenium—it is distracting, in the way that the motions of a floor polisher can become deeply interesting during a long wait in an airport lounge.

The singers move slo-o-owly, as any Wilson singer must. This style was perfected in tandem with the great Philip Glass spectacles of the seventies and eighties, notably "Einstein on the Beach." Glass's fast, static music helps Wilson's motions make some kind of sense; Wagner's slow, transformative music does not. Wagner imposes enough hardships on singers to make Wilson's frozen Kabuki poses seem a touch sadistic. My heart sank every time the large-voiced, large-framed Deborah Voigt had to creep onstage, her arms locked in an attitude that recalled Washington crossing the Delaware. Each of her entrances felt like the recurrence of a nightmare. A Wilson fanatic might argue that her pose is symbolic of the unhappy condition of Elsa, who is betrothed to Lohengrin and yet is forbidden to know his name. But we don't learn enough about the characters to make any associative leaps. The opera was peopled by Slow-Moving Woman, Man with Spearlike Tube, Angry Woman in Purple, Angry Man in Black, and White-Faced, Apparently Important Man. The music had nothing to say about them.

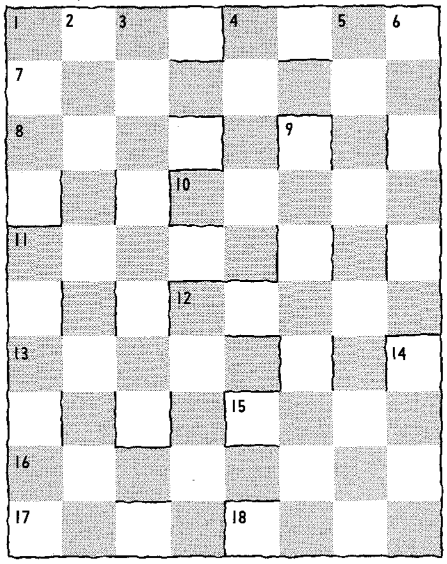
This production fell right on the line between failure and fraud. Still, I admire the Met for taking the risk. At least something theatrical is happening in Bing's big opera barn, even if it takes the form of entire balconies of opera fanatics booing their hearts out because nothing is happening onstage. The disaster of this "Lohengrin"—and I must acknowledge that some people actually liked it, among them, according to the *Post*, Wagner's great-granddaughter Eva—should not detract from a generally strong run of new productions this season. The Met seems to have developed excellent relationships with directors like Jonathan Miller and Elijah Moshinsky, who are able to deploy bold scenic concepts without discarding such anachronisms as character and plot. Moshinsky's "Samson," which just closed, was a real triumph—a deft balancing of giant abstract forms and athletic choreography. Let's hope the encounter with Robert Wilson turns out to be a one-night stand.

There was, by the way, some splendid playing and singing on opening night, even though it all seemed very far away—almost offstage. (Offstage was where the famous wedding march remained.) James Levine pointed up contrasts more surely than he has done in his past Wagnerthons; this "Lohengrin" and last spring's "Ring" have shown him at his peak as a Wagnerian. Voigt started out with a few uncharacteristically cautious, tremulous high notes—possibly the result of physical discomfort—but managed to get across the forceful elegance of her voice by Act III. Deborah Polaski, with her hard-edged, sometimes erratic soprano, was a good fit for the hard-edged, erratic Ortrud, and her long experience with Eurotrash productions made her seem quite at home in this one. Eric Halfvarson used his exceptionally broad-ranging bass to good effect as King Henry. Hans-Joachim Ketelsen, as Telramund, was the weak link, hollering a bit in the upper register and groping in the lower.

The redeemer of the night was Ben Heppner, whose increasingly heroic tenor cut through all the Wilson weirdness. He came to the very edge of the stage to sing his closing monologue, "In fernem Land": the voice was full and close, even in a melancholy sotto voce. Something in his bearing seemed to say: Forget what's behind me—imagine a far-off land where "Lohengrin" makes sense. A few days later, Heppner appeared in a concert at Avery Fisher Hall with the Orchestra of St. Luke's under Julius Rudel, and sang, among other things, "In fernem Land"; the great monologue "Nur eine Waffe taugt," from "Parsifal"; and the splendid Wagnerian finale of Richard Strauss's first opera, "Guntram." Heppner sounded severely strained at first and then seemed to thrill in the recovery from crisis. Parsifal's command "Uncover the Grail! Open the shrine!" rang out with a trace of fury—a welcome sign of turbulence in this sometimes too even-tempered singer. Heppner is the herald of a new generation of singers who can really sing Wagner and not just scream it. We are still looking for a new generation of Wagner directors who can direct. ♦

8x10 CRYPTIC

NO. 38 BY MONIKA ZOOK



ACROSS

1 Cut some of Schiaparelli's material (4)
4 True, Dior's original article is "pop" (4)
7 Fashion leader: "No flower" (8)
8 Shirt's front label: "For men only" (4)
10 Great space for a guy sporting a tux (5)
11 Force front of dress to tear (5)
12 Sister acquires Armani's first two garments (5)
13 Wearer of a robe and a conical hat in magazine *Us* (5)
15 Part of London very hot on Coco's last piece (4)
16 Dotty remodels less often (8)
17 Hem covered by polished gems (4)
18 Menswear item with "vee" established (4)

DOWN

1 Reported poet's work for a fashion photographer (4)
2 De la Renta moved around town and changed back and forth (10)
3 Measurements of jewelry framing each damsel's face (8)
4 Tailor nears a place to get snagged? (5)
5 Drunken model—she is in ruins (10)
6 Sleeve is worn by a swashbuckling Frenchman (6)
9 Quartet in fabricated moose fur (8)
11 End of Ms. Moore's blouse, at the back (6)
12 Leather was convincing to an audience (5)
14 Categorize Blass's last scrap (4)

• •

The solution to puzzle No. 37 appears on page 121. For a free copy of "The New Yorker's Guide to Solving Cryptic Crosswords," please send your fax number or a stamped, self-addressed envelope to "Solvers' Guide," The New Yorker, 20 West 43rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10036. For an electronic version, send an E-mail to puzzleguide@newyorker.com.

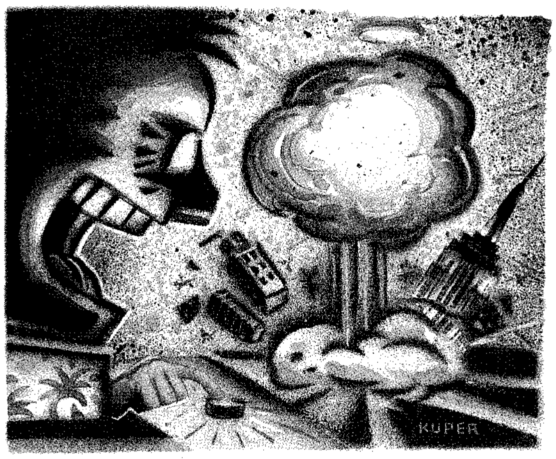
SHOUTS & MURMURS

CONTINENTAL DIVIDE

BY MARK LEYNER

AMONG the amazing new spate of video games (Tellurian Defender, Resident Evil 2, Riven: The Sequel to Myst, and, of course, Duke Nukem: Total Meltdown), one bad boy in particular has hard-core gamers (this reviewer among them) shuddering in button-mashing ecstasy: Red-Eye Apocalypse.

The year is 2010. The former United States of America is engulfed in a cataclysmic war between the city-states of Manhattan and Los Angeles. You are a top-ranking commander leading an élite unit on a mission to annihilate your foe and establish continental supremacy. Middle America has collapsed into "the Gorge"—a huge, mephitic pit, populated by insatiable flesh-eating zombies, mutants, and ex-freshman congressmen ravenous for human viscera. Only one metropolis will survive. It's all up to you—and you've got just over five hours. (Red-Eye's designer, Hiroshi Takemitsu, has shrewdly constrained game play to the average duration of an LAX-JFK flight.)



Red-Eye Apocalypse features fifty levels of adrenaline-pumping, real-time 3Dfx carnage. With an elaborate but user-friendly Persona Menu, you configure a customized character, and play from first-person perspective. How about a narcissistic, British-expatriate handbag designer turned tank commander? Select cocaine, Campari, and light spanking from the easy-to-use Vice and Peccadillo Tool Box.

But you can't wage a bicoastal war alone. You'll need to marshal a crack squad of fighters—figures ripped from the front pages of today's newspapers, each animated with astonishing verisimilitude. Playing the N.Y.C. side, you can launch an armored juggernaut with Mort Zuckerman, Robert Pittman, Tommy Mottola, and Cindy Adams under your command. Imagine leading Pia Miller Getty, Alexandra von Fürstenberg, and Isaac Mizrahi, armed with acid-spewing Super Soakers, up the Pacific Coast Highway for a terrorist assault on Broad Beach in Malibu.

Playing L.A.? How about storming the Guggenheim with Scott Rudin, Jerry Bruckheimer, David Hasselhoff, and the checking line of the Anaheim Mighty Ducks, each wielding a nine-millimetre submachine gun in one hand and an Irving Thalberg lifetime-achievement award in the other. Go for it, baby!

The sci-fi Armageddon ambience is vividly rendered. In New York, grizzled combatants step lightly over civilian casualties; in L.A., of course, you drive over "collateral damage" as if it were so many speed bumps. Amid the sanguinary chaos you'll also discover oases of calm. Fight your way up Second Avenue, in brutal brownstone-to-brownstone combat, and duck into Elaine's. Here you'll find yourself becalmed by the convivial hubbub and urbane gemütlichkeit, while outside, visible through the front windows, internecine warfare rages on.

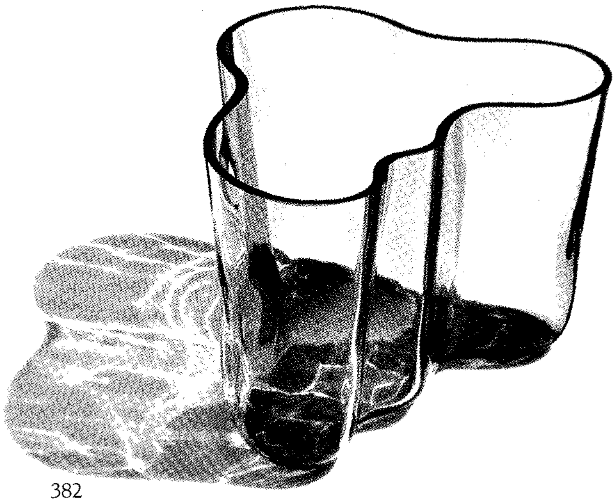
Strategy is key. Capture Mulholland Drive, atop the mountains, and you'll be able to rain a barrage of artillery down on Hollywood and the Valley. Nothing this reviewer has ever experienced in video or computer games can quite compare to sending an élite squad of nuke-toting South Central Crips into Mortimer's, the blue-blood enclave on Manhattan's Upper East Side. Or leading a victorious procession of M1A1 battle tanks down Rodeo Drive as Mexican housekeepers shower you with gardenias.

Red-Eye Apocalypse also gives you the option of using Zagat's restaurant surveys as targeting guides. Surround Osteria del Circo at lunch and, after bribing the maître d', take hundreds of influential P.O.W.s. The advanced Zagat Targeting System makes it possible to calibrate reciprocal strikes: if the enemy hits, say, the biological-weapons facilities hidden within Matsuhisa, you automatically take out Command and Control at Nobu.

One quibble. The ersatz Fran Drescher narrator, who delivers portentous pseudo-Homeric commentary throughout, grates a bit: "Sing, goddess, the anger of Rudy's son, Andrew, and its devastation, which put pains a thousandfold upon the Angelenos." But this is a trivial complaint. What can you say about a game that includes hand-to-hand combat with "Star Wars" lightsabres in the kitchen of Frank Gehry's Santa Monica home and allows you to launch a cruise-missile attack on Balthazar from a submarine in the Hudson River? Bravo!

It's almost as much of a rush to watch others play Red-Eye Apocalypse as it is to play it yourself. There you are, at thirty thousand feet, three hours out of LAX, slicing through the night sky, your fellow-passengers riveted to their open laptops as they rabidly wage the eternal L.A.-N.Y. rivalry in virtual battle. You almost forget—in fact, you do forget—that on the ground below, nestled in the heartland, are not hordes of ravenous, flesh-eating mutants, slithering from the curdled magma of the Gorge, but intelligent, simple-hearted Americans—men, women, children—in safe and gentle slumber.

Yuck. ♦



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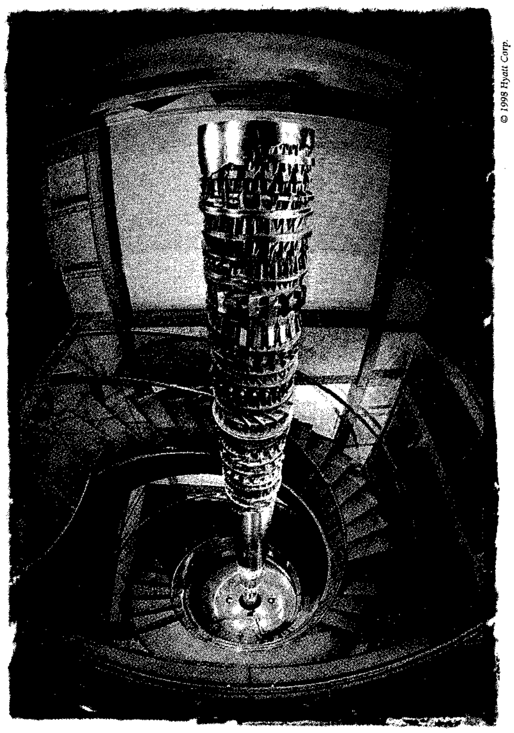

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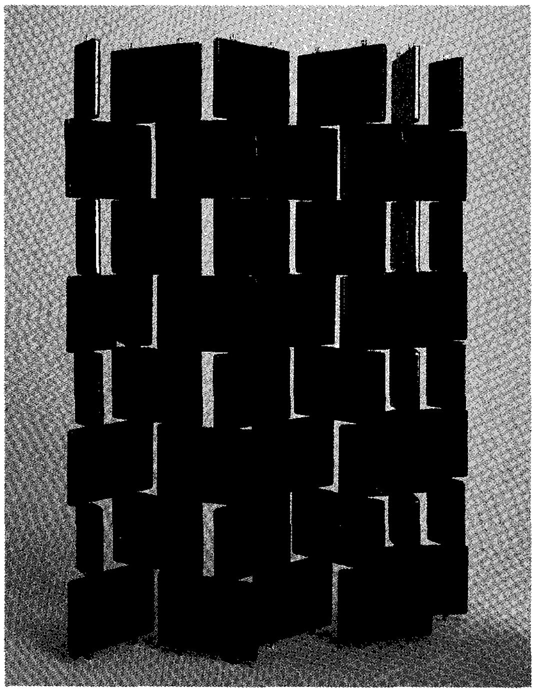

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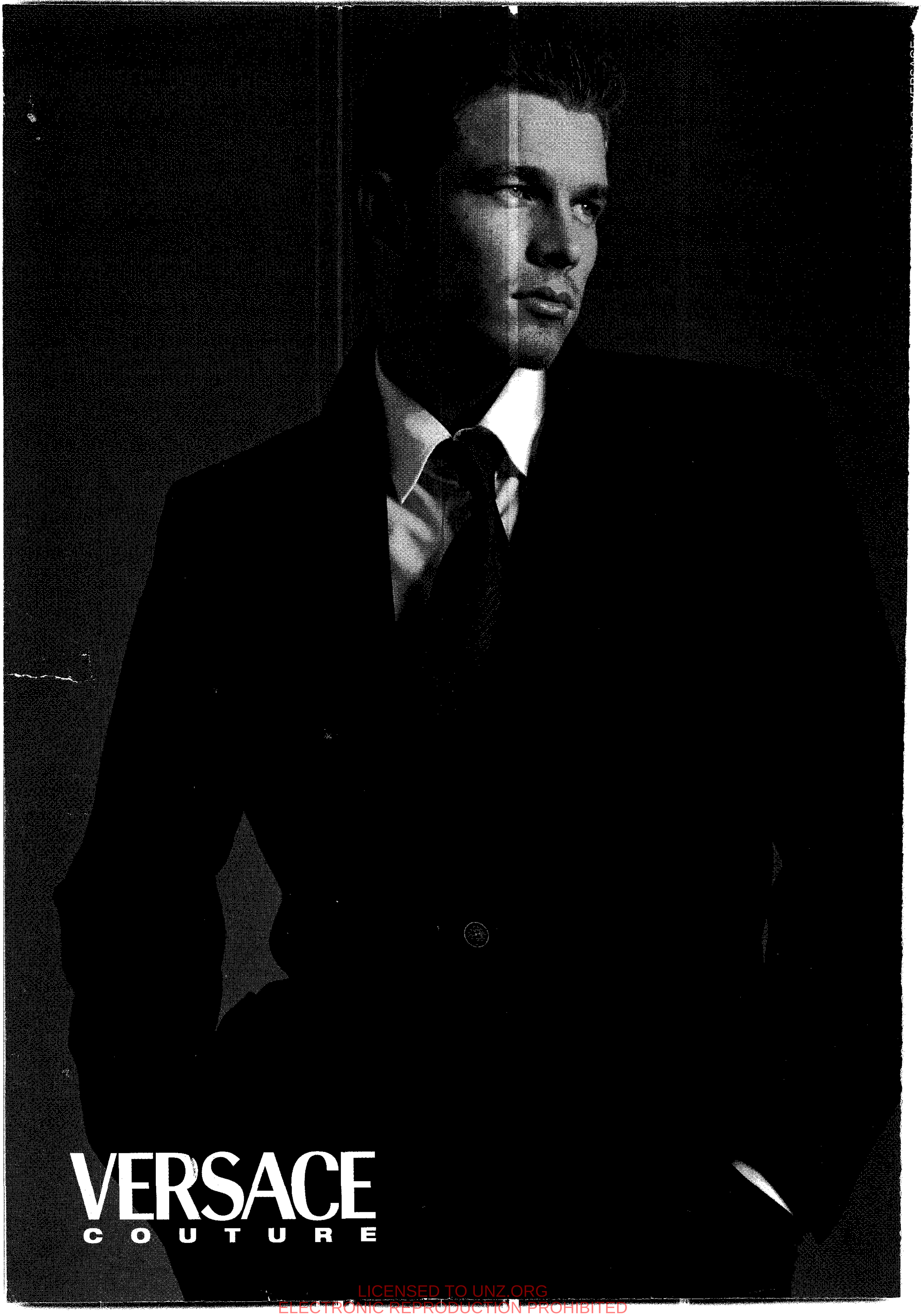
382. **Alvar Aalto. Vase.** 1936. Amber cast crystal glass. 6¼" (16 cm) high. Made in Finland by Iittala. Gift of Artek-Pascoe, Inc.

383. **Park Hyatt Hotel. Staircase.** 1991. Dramatic 3-story tubular steel and glass stairway. Ascends to a 4-star grillroom that's heightened in altitude and culinary attitude. Spirals around a 31' cast-bronze sculpture that's banded in hand-carved hieroglyphic geometric reliefs. Grounded in a foundation of black river rock that's just a stone's throw away from an omniscient concierge whose sole purpose in life is to make your stay as perfectly eventful or uneventful as you desire. The Park Hyatt collection: Los Angeles, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Washington D.C. and Chicago (2000). Buenos Aires, Canberra, Johannesburg, London, Madrid, Sydney and Tokyo. (Reservations: 1 800 233 1234) The Park Hyatt. Classic. Modern. Luxury.

384. **Eileen Gray. Block Screen.** 1925. Lacquered wood on metal rods. 74½ x 53½" (188.5 x 136 cm). Hector Guimard Fund.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